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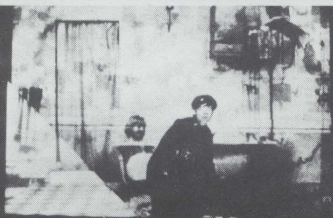
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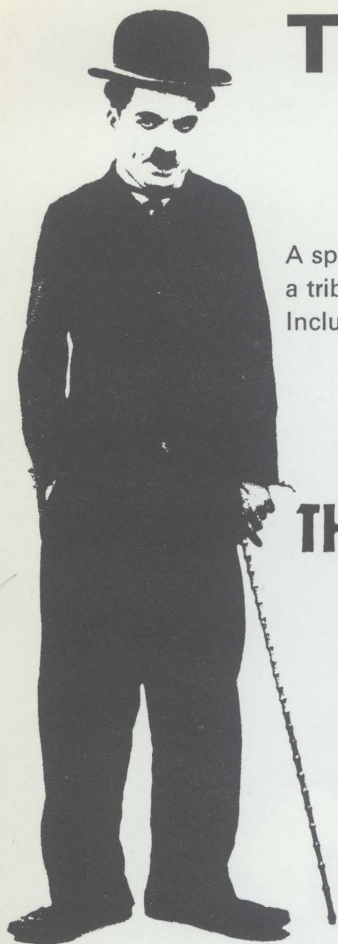
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Right: *The Picture Show Man* (John Power)
Below: *Effi Briest* (Fassbinder)



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SPRING 1978

Volume 47 No. 2

SIGHT AND SOUND

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*On the cover: Jason Robards in
Alan Pakula's 'Comes a Horseman'*

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BALCON'

A visit to Sir Michael and Lady Balcon at their Sussex home was always something to look forward to with warm anticipation. Sir Michael enjoyed remembering the past—the films, the people, the defeats and victories—but he preferred to talk about the present and the future. He made me feel I had come from the battle front. He wanted to know everything: what films were being planned, who the new promising film-makers were and what new strategy was being employed to change the film industry.

Last summer the questions were more particular and specific, since he was working on a report for the Interim Action Committee at the invitation of Sir Harold Wilson. He talked passionately and at length about his ideas. When I expressed doubts about the composition of the Committee—no directors or writers and only two producers—and therefore their willingness to consider radical views, he chided me for my pessimism, which he regarded as self-defeating: 'You see the glass as half empty, I see it as half full.'

A couple of months later he sent me the draft of his submission to the Committee, saying that he hoped that it would be made public after the IAC had made its recommendations. Here it is.—MAMOUN HASSAN

When considering the future of the film industry, the past must be taken into account as inescapable. When the British Film Fund (Eady Money) was introduced in 1950, at first as a voluntary measure and then by statute, Britain represented the second largest film market in the world. Today it is seventh and Britain's share of world box-office revenues is about 4½ per cent. By today's figures the Fund represents some ½ per cent of world gross. To argue, therefore, that the Fund as it is now dealt with is a significant and sufficient incentive must be open to doubt, and to suggest further that it means a great deal for American film investors is also open to question.

It is essential to jettison the belief that, given the right legislation and the right incentive, the Americans are going to save us. This myth has sapped our will and fed our fantasies to 'get rich quick'. The reality is sobering. In the last fifty years I have seen American drives leading to temporary employment, false hopes and inflation; and American departures followed by collapse. I could give chapter and verse of these incursions and withdrawals. The fact is that we can do very little to guarantee American involvement. Film companies, irrespective of nationality, are governed entirely by self-interest and American companies are certainly no exception. They respond—understandably—to American fiscal policies, which include *inter alia* the maintenance of Hollywood as a world production centre. It is alas the policy of American companies, for both political and economic reasons, to use every effort to retain a hold on world markets. Any activities in countries other than the United States, be it in exhibition, distribution or production, must be part of this overall design.

The failure of the present policy of almost total reliance on Atlantic films, or, as they are fashionably referred to these days, international co-productions, is evident to all but a few. These productions are British only if film is regarded as a manufacturing industry. True, there is the odd success—the benefits from which, incidentally, do not flow into this country but to the multi-national companies and their foreign holdings—but that does not create an industry. International co-productions do, however, lead to the most stringent restrictions on creativity and to inflation. This comment applies not only to co-production with American companies but also, to a lesser degree, to European co-production. We have only one realistic course to pursue, that of an indigenous British film industry. We can neither support nor nourish any other. Our critics tell us that returns from the British market cannot repay investment. The fact is that misjudgment and lack of commitment have led to high-cost productions by creating expectations of American salaries and demands for American-scale crewing. They have also fed an ever decreasing audience on a diet of mid-Atlantic mutations so that it has no stomach for the real thing. The evidence shows that Britain has been effective only when its film-makers have operated from a studio or house base. It would be wise, when considering any future model for the industry, to build on this tradition.

A scheme should be worked out for the formation of an equivalent of the Crown Film Unit to produce six or more features a year, and an appropriate number of short films. It should occupy permanent space at one or other of the studios. British films must have the same status as the Royal Ballet Company, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. It is only a Unit such as a 'Crown' that could bring this about. Parallel with this, there should be a review of all monies given to grant-aided bodies, such as the Arts Council (in respect of their film production activities), the British Film

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Institute, the Children's Film Foundation, the Central Office of Information, the Coal Board and British Transport. These bodies have different aims and different briefs and in any new structure their diverse functions should be retained—possibly by the creation of separate entities—and their creative autonomy ensured. However, administratively they should be dealt with from the central body so that facilities can be shared.

Film graduates should look to these bodies for employment. A Bill of Rights is needed: no person should be trained for casual employment or the dole. At present the student graduate knows that he cannot go to the industry for employment—all it is interested in is bankable names. You don't need talent to get work these days; you need a miracle.

Future legislation should make sure that benefits accruing to American companies and their British subsidiaries and our own vertically integrated combines should be carefully monitored. They are perfectly capable of looking after themselves; and it is unreasonable that public funds should be used to boost their satisfactory balance sheets.

It is my submission that losses, if any, which arise from the operations of the reconstructed National Film Finance Corporation (which would include those of the Crown Film Unit) should be the first charge annually on the revenue accruing from the British Film Fund; only the balance of the revenues to be available for distribution on a revised formula. I submit that Recommendation 2a, page 1 in the Report of the Prime Minister's Working Party on the Future of the British Film Industry* should be revised in accordance with this suggestion.

This seems to me the most certain guarantee that public funds are going back to

film production. The quota provisions of the Cinematograph Films Act provide some protection for a number of British films *if they are made*. The Act, however, under today's conditions, does not cause any films to be made.

Assuming it is decided to provide National Film Finance Corporation funds and a Crown Unit (to be administered by the NFFC), it should be a direction to NFFC that no monies should be made available for film production unless in each and every case there is a substantial investment by the producing company concerned. In the case of American companies and their subsidiaries and the British combines, by way of cash. For other producing companies by way of investment of services, facilities, etc., on a *pari passu* participation basis.

I am not submitting formulae in this report on strictly controlled participating arrangements, although I have discussed this subject with producers and with Richard Craven of the Association of Independent Producers. Sufficient to say that in my view such participation could approach something like 50 per cent of production cost. Participation with the production company would include *inter alia* distribution, laboratory, companies supplying facilities, stars, producer, director, script and certain senior technicians.

Such schemes provide for *minimum payments* during pre-production, production and post-production periods, but they also mean participation in the revenue in perpetuity. It is also good tax planning since revenue may well accrue (on a diminishing scale) for thirty years or more. Successful films can provide a valuable annuity. It should be noted that many British films are producing revenues some thirty or forty years after production date. There will also be financial failures, which will mean the loss in whole or part of notional investments.

As a number of important companies are interested in both cinema and television, one expects some equivocation in their attitudes to the problems of the film industry. But it is all the more surprising to find that their attitude in respect of film is based on a fallacy—namely, non-recognition of the fact that the audience for films is now substantially in the house and not in the cinema. A state of affairs to some extent brought about by their own activities. It is TV itself in any form which deprives the cinema of its audience.

It is surely difficult to accept that cinemas (even twins and triplets) are the exclusive means of exhibiting films. This was largely so between the wars when cinemas (Real Estate) were the collateral security for much of film

finance. This is no longer the position. Steady and progressive decline in attendances, since the peak of 1948, surely establishes without fear of contradiction that the audience is now largely in the home. The position may be stabilised but will not be reversed.

Television should provide a fund comparable with the British Film Fund and also should pay for films on a basis which relates the price to the size of the audience. Film-makers should surely not insulate themselves from this market by artificial restrictions, as by so doing they are acting against their long-term interests. The total market that is both cinema and television must be open to the film-makers.

I have not commented on other important matters (despite very definite views) as it could be held with some validity that, not having been engaged in film-making for some time, my thinking is out of date. It is submitted that the items on which I have expressed opinions are principles arrived at through long experience, unaffected by time factors. The recent report by the 'Think Tank' on the activities of the British Council and the BBC Overseas Service prompts me to add these final paragraphs.

The Crown Film Unit (set up in 1940* and growing out of the G.P.O. Film Unit, which in turn took over from the Empire Marketing Board Unit), having done valuable work for twelve years, was mercilessly done to death in 1952 in one of those recurring financial crises which so often result in damage to things of permanent value whilst extravagant waste in other directions continues. Twenty-two years of inestimable public service wiped out overnight.

The EMB/GPO/Crown Units, to their everlasting credit, provided early employment for Benjamin Britten, Constant Lambert, W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, William Coldstream, C. Day Lewis, Grierson, Cavalcanti, Basil Wright, Edgar Anstey, Humphrey Jennings, Pat Jackson, Arthur Elton amongst many others. Crown and its predecessors—more than anything else—helped to create a national style. Without this national style no country's film production can be permanent or prosperous.

Michael Balcon

* In April 1940 the Treasury authorised transfer of administrative and financial control of the G.P.O. Film Unit to the Ministry of Information; and in December 1940 it officially became the Crown Film Unit. Before the April decision, at a time of uncertainty about the G.P.O. Unit's future, Sir Michael Balcon had offered to take it over.

TAMENT

* Recommendation 2a of the Working Party Report: 'An annual allocation from the British Film Fund of one-fifth of the total annual yield of the Eady Levy not exceeding £1 million' (Paragraph 32).

FREARS and COMPANY

Conversations with
Stephen Frears
Alan Bennett
Brian Tufano
Chris Menges

David Badder

The origins of this article can be found in an ambition to meet Stephen Frears in order to discuss his films and a curiosity about the current climate of television filming. The fact that Frears had worked with the same collaborators on a number of occasions seemed all the more reason to talk to several of them—separately but, in one sense, collectively—about their work. (One notable absentee is Peter Prince, author of four scripts directed by Frears, who was unavailable at the time.) What emerged from the meetings was a group of film-makers who had met under the massive umbrella of the television companies and afterwards sought to retain their individual voices through each other's creative abilities. Obviously, the complex and inflexible confines of the television corporations cannot embrace complete freedom of artistic expression, but since commercial considerations are far less important than they are in the cinema, it may be that the television film-makers will provide an increasingly potent contribution to British film-making over the next decade.

Right: the first Stephen Frears/Alan Bennett collaboration, 'A Day Out'.
Below right: Gabrielle Daye and Harry Markham as the retired couple in 'Sunset Across the Bay'

The specific qualities to be found in Frears' work are attention to detail, precise evocation of place and time, and telling characterisation (he has a great gift for choosing exactly the right actor for each role). Through understated but concise direction, he is admirably faithful to his writers' themes and pre-occupations while still retaining his own individual tone. Three of his films have been stylish and amusing period reconstructions: Alan Bennett's wryly observant *A Day Out*, Tom Stoppard's excellent adaptation, shorn of Jerome's more tiresome whimsy, of *Three Men in a Boat*, and *England Their England*. The latter, set just after the First World War, follows the engagingly absurd fortunes of a 'friendly' cricket match between a team from a London publishing office and a village side. Most of the time is devoted to sinking pints of beer, but before the game is diplomatically drawn the locals unveil their demon bowler, the giant blacksmith who, despite his size, is invisible to the batsman until the very moment of delivery because of the way the playing field dips away from just behind the bowling crease. Similar in tone is Neville Smith's *Match of the Day*, a half-hour gem about a wedding reception held in a marquee in which the hero, played by Smith himself, hilariously sends up the pretensions of the occasion as he tries to discover a way he can listen to the day's football results.

In a more serious vein, Peter Prince's modern and open-minded stories elicit from Frears a more direct, dynamic approach. *Last Summer* has the excellent Richard Beckinsale instructing a tiro thief in the art of pinching cars, while Chris Menges' camera is invariably perched precariously atop the cars' bonnets; *Play Things*, set in an adventure playground (again with a background of organised crime), and shot by Brian Tufano in a rich array of primary colours, brims with engagingly bizarre characters: the ageing Teddy Boys who, almost religiously, arrange an annual coach outing to visit the grave of their hero, Eddie Cochran; the rival teenage gang leaders—one black, one white—whose thuggish attitudinising mirrors their gangster fathers' actions.

Prince's writing, however, has to date tended to lack overall shape, and it is Alan Bennett's scripts, with their pinpoint characterisation and beguilingly straightforward plots, that have fostered Frears' best work. *A Visit from Miss Prothero*, their latest collaboration, is a corrosively funny (though ultimately tragic) account of a spinster's call on her retired ex-boss—within the time it takes her to drink a cup of tea, she has destroyed a lifetime's achievements with her tales of his successor's complete reorganisation of his office systems. But best of all is *Sunset Across the Bay*, which follows the retirement to Morecambe of a Leeds couple, and is a marvellously affecting and accurate portrait. It is for films of this calibre that one waits impatiently for the series of films currently being made for London Weekend by these two gifted artists.



Stephen Frears

Stephen Frears began in films as assistant director on *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment*, *Charlie Bubbles* and *If...*. He then made the short film *The Burning*, followed by his first feature, *Gumshoe*; in between he worked in television, notably as director of *A Day Out*, written by Alan Bennett. His subsequent work, apart from the films mentioned below, includes *England Their England*, *Match of the Day* (from Neville Smith), *Early Struggles* (from Peter Prince) and *Eighteen Months to Balcombe Street*. Particularly good with actors, Frears has a style distinguished by his knack of approaching his scripts from an off-centre viewpoint which highlights subtleties of feeling that occur outside the main nucleus of the story. He is extremely self-effacing—and also self-critical—when discussing his work.

I've recently made two films for Verity Lambert and Barry Hanson at Thames Television, *Last Summer* and the one I'm finishing now (untitled at the moment, possibly either *The Innocent* or *Cold Harbour*), which I've managed to get Chris Menges in to photograph. I can't say how they would be shot on 35 mm and I can't say how anybody else would shoot them, but I feel they are not shot like anybody else's films on television. They are shot very dangerously, with very little light, because Chris is a very dangerous cameraman. I mean there is so much developing spontaneously, so much not planned. If they let us post-sync bits of *The Innocent*, then that will be really good because we'll have greater control of sound. They're not very used to post-syncing in television—they tend to shoot a lot of natural sound. I've found that the further I go the more control I want on the sound. If you see those really good American movies now—the money they must have spent on the soundtrack is fantastic.

In *Black Christmas*, made for the BBC, the most complicated scene was the dinner party and that was the first thing I'd shot in stereo on television. It was the sound recordist's idea but it seemed to have a nice quality because of it. You just go on pushing, so *The Innocent* is mostly shot in stereo. It's really a simple complaint of wanting more control over the elements I like working with. Actually, I like making films set 'now', as it were, but conditions get tougher, shooting time shorter and the money becomes harder to get, especially if you make films that are slightly

off-centre. And control you have to pay for, there's nothing complicated about it. You also need time. And a different cultural atmosphere: a much better education in film, a much greater understanding of its power.

You don't write shooting scripts, or at any rate I don't. I'm not in a position to prepare it as I ought to be, so I end up going out one day with a wonderful cameraman, a good writer and wonderful actors and making it up as I go along. Not actually writing scenes, but I am very careless; I've always had a strong sense of careless preparation and shooting far





'Play Things', scripted by Peter Prince and set in an adventure playground



'Eighteen Months to Balcombe Street', Frears' semi-documentary reconstruction of I.R.A. operations in London

too much on instinct. Television films are like documentaries—you can't get away from it if you make the decision not to want to shoot in that sort of documentary style. You get very fly at learning how to shoot on location, but I think it's a bad influence now. Because you can't create anything, you can only get better at shooting what's there. *Sunset Across the Bay* was written for mid-summer; well, the BBC scheduled it for October. That's the end of it—you don't make the film the author has written, you don't make what you originally set out to make. You make a film about people retiring to Morecambe in October and that's quite different. I think that is more destructive than people realise. Classical drama doesn't deal with that sort of element of chance, you design things much more. It's very frustrating when you suddenly realise that the scene ought to have some element you can't put into it.

I enjoyed doing Christopher Hampton's

play, *Able's Will*, because when you do a video play you tend to lay it out and rehearse it more, though even that was shot slightly like a film, cut like a film. Obviously, you have greater control over things if you shoot with three cameras on stages in the studio. Shooting on film is much harder, more rigorous. By definition you're surrendering control to a cameraman and therefore you depend on other virtues. Working with Chris Menges and Brian Tufano, the function of the camera is getting more interesting the whole time. I did four films in a row with Brian. We started off shooting in a classical television style, rather plain, lots of two-shots, quite restrained. Then it started to get more complicated and we ended up shooting a film called *Play Things*, which I remember shooting fast and very giddily.

Much of *The Innocent* took place in small rooms and around tables, which drives me insane—Peter Prince, the writer, and I had

endless rows about it. Since a lot of the film was shot in rather cramped surroundings, which means you can't shoot as interestingly as you would like, the crew like it when you construct complicated shots, it gives them something to concentrate on. Suddenly you get into the street and you forget about everything else and just concentrate on one shot, one wonderful shot. At that moment the film seems to have a focus. I saw *New York, New York* last night and Kovacs' photography is so wonderful; that way of shooting is so stunning, evocative, moving. Chris and I are absolutely terrified of moving the camera—tell me an English director you think moves the camera well. Nick Roeg does it but then he was a cameraman. I'm slightly fed up with the classical style of shooting—I want to rebel a bit, mainly against myself. But at the moment I'm too inhibited. I set out intending to move the camera freely and can't; the camera will scarcely move away from the actors, it will always take its movement from the actors.

For some reason I've made a lot of films in the country. I have no feelings for the countryside at all; I like cities, underground car parks, pavements. Actually, I'd love to make a thriller. Neville Smith wrote a thriller with *Gumshoe* and it ended up as a comedy. Neither of us could make the leap, suspend disbelief. There is no tradition of English crime films, is there? Those people who make *The Sweeney* do them rather well. But they're so removed from the more literary style I would want to work in that I just can't imagine bringing all the elements together. Did you hear on the news tonight about that one hundred million pounds worth of LSD discovered in Wales? Why aren't people writing about that or, if they are, why are they writing about it on such a narrow scale?

In *Gumshoe*, Neville and I set out to make *Bullitt* but after a time we had a sort of joke about it—that if you tried to make a film like *Bullitt* in this country it would end up being called *Pellet*! We wanted to have some machine-guns and every now and then Neville would write a violent scene—but it was just daft. He couldn't put his heart into it, and then he would write these wonderful comic scenes about someone dreaming about it all. I was conscious of a sort of embarrassment on my part about getting into a world where people could be killed, since these are not things I know a great deal about. Or Neville. He was writing out of images from films he'd seen. The scene of the fat man being killed was specifically taken from the scene where Elisha Cook is forced to take poison in *The Big Sleep*. So you are half making up a dream sequence and half trying to make it realistic. In England, that combination rarely comes off, but the French and people like Wim Wenders seem to be able to pass through the curtain. They pass through it and reach an area that they believe in. In English films you don't because those policemen wear silly helmets. I don't know how you make an elegant thriller in this country. Who would you cast as a policeman, what English actor? Who in England is like Lino Ventura? If you cast those regular British actors as cops it's just daft. They got round lots of those problems in *Performance*.

I do seem able to get my films to come to life, but within the crew there is always a sort of chaos—people are furious and rebelling. I quite like the chaos because a lot of accidents

occur and that seems to be how good things happen. I think I sometimes tend to concentrate on the peripheral events in my films rather than what's happening at the centre. It seems to happen every time and I'm sure comes from the three writers, Alan Bennett, Peter Prince and Neville Smith, whom I've mainly worked with.

If you think of those three writers, the bits they write at the edges are wonderful. You can't pretend that Neville has a strong sense of plot, and Alan writes a very simple short story, and with Peter the convolutions are more interesting than the simplicities. I just think I do them a slight disservice by not making certain elements clearer. I ought to try to get the spine much stronger. I mean, it does seem to be what a lot of people see films for. *The Innocent* has a stronger dramatic line in the night scenes which occupy the last quarter of the film. And that's the bit we got right first. It's perfectly simple and I've never had something like that before—it was rather nice. All this oblique stuff takes a long time to cut, getting the balance right. There is always a certain amount of salvage, and it also involves shooting an enormous amount of material and then synthesising it. I guess that was the fault with *Last Summer*: we got the oblique side and the off-centre vision, but the spine of it was never really there.

I almost wouldn't shoot now without the writer being on the set. I really do find not having the writer there confusing. What's nice about Peter, Alan and Neville is that in what they write certain things matter and certain things don't. Provided you respect what they think is important, they really don't mind what you do on the edges. And that makes life interesting. But that shot we were doing when you were there was a very complicated tracking shot and at that point you can't separate *mise en scène* from the writing. Therefore, it's very important that the writer understands that.

I'd give my right arm for a movie; well, on a night like this, not at other times. I wouldn't have wanted to make any British film for a long time. It's really depressing the films that are being made in this country. And I think continuity is very important; at least in television I've been able to work regularly with the same cameramen and the same actors. The people making cinema films in this country today have none of that freedom. All those film-makers with an individual voice go and work abroad. That's rather depressing but you can see why they do it. Good luck to anyone who stays!

After a time it's possible to work within the confines of the television companies and still try to discover your own voice. Very few people seem to do that in the cinema and, for better or worse, that seems to be what I'm after. And I'm not permanently embattled with the TV companies about material: nobody has ever tried to get me to cut a scene or anything like that. It's very delicate—because *Last Summer* was a success I've been able to make *The Innocent*. I asked them if I could make it, but it's always slightly tricky. I'm currently doing a lot of work with Alan Bennett on a series for London Weekend; Peter's in Germany writing something... Yes, I'd like to make a film but I think if it didn't have the qualities we've talked about; it would be a waste of everybody's time—producer, writer and director.



Alan Bennett

Alan Bennett

Alan Bennett, the most widely known of the quartet through his *Beyond the Fringe* days and his subsequent stage plays, has written four scripts for television. Three were directed by Stephen Frears (*A Day Out*, *Sunset Across the Bay*, *A Visit from Miss Prothero*) and the fourth by Brian Tufano (*A Little Outing*). They are all set in the North and are to some extent semi-biographical, drawing on Bennett's upbringing in Leeds. Bennett has a particular gift for naturalistic dialogue.

It seems to me there are two sides to Stephen's films—a nostalgic, gentle side and another side which is much more to do with action. The things I write probably cater for the first while the things he's done with Peter Prince, for instance, seem to be the other side. I think that's true of his character as well. He's very much a writer's director in the sense that he follows your intentions through. Being there on location I have access to the actors, whereas in the theatre a director would keep the actors to himself. Sometimes Stephen will avoid stating something directly because he has that sort of temperament. In *Sunset Across the Bay* most of the images were of regret for the past, not so much nostalgia but of the world threatening this

couple who had retired. There was a scene in an allotment, where the old man was clearing up and leaving the allotment for good and there were some kids riding around on bicycles—slightly vandals—and I'd made this quite strong in the script. When we came to shoot it, Stephen slightly watered it down, made more of a joke of it. I queried this and he said he thought it would be overweighted my way—in the circumstances he was quite right not to over-emphasise it. It's also much better if things are happening on the edge of frame—ideally the best film would be where everything was on the edge of frame and just very ordinary things happening in the foreground.

This is why I admire Stephen's technique and what he gets out of actors. For this reason, people don't tend to think of it as his film, and maybe he suffers for that. It's all right once you've built up a reputation, but if you start off like that you don't get noticed, you somehow are thought not to have a point of view or to be ducking issues. The writer gets the credit. I particularly felt this with *A Visit from Miss Prothero*, since that was more of a collaboration than the others. Apart from Stephen, there was George Fenton who did the music. To start with we thought there wasn't a place for music and then Stephen thought we ought to try to saturate it with music. Watching it on television, I was pleased with the result, and it actually gave me some ideas about things I'd like to do with voice-overs and music which I wouldn't otherwise have had.

We don't alter the script much before we shoot. I generally go through about three drafts before I reach a final script. Stephen will see maybe the first draft and make some suggestions but we don't normally go through it scene by scene. I've just been working with Lindsay Anderson and we've entirely reconstructed the script I gave him. Lindsay accepted the script because he thought he could see in it things he wanted to do, and in a sense it's much more the director as kind of part author. Lindsay has very definite views about society, and working with him makes me think very hard about some of the things I do and about some of my dialogue. Stephen is like me, he likes jokes;

'A Visit from Miss Prothero': Hugh Lloyd, Patricia Routledge



Lindsay doesn't like jokes. We put in things which we know are a bit silly simply because it makes us laugh, whereas Lindsay will tend to ask whether this is really serving the overall purpose.

This is for a London Weekend series of six unconnected plays. Stephen is producing them all—he's never produced before—and directing four; the others are by Lindsay and Giles Foster. I've never worked for an independent company before—one of the good things about them is that they have a lot of enthusiasm because they do much less of this sort of thing than the BBC. I wrote these plays when I was in the North for a year after my father died in 1974; I have ideas and I write them down, then it takes a long time for them to come to anything. Four of them are about the North, two are set in London.

It's just that I make characters talk somehow Northern, the way the sentences are put together. I find this with things I write for the stage—I often don't know what is Northern and what isn't. It doesn't seem to me particularly Northern to say 'I thought it was good was that'—which is Northern. I would normally regard that as standard English, but when you get someone like Alec Guinness saying it, it sounds rather different. I do think writing for the theatre requires more density. If a play has to run for a long time then it's got to wear well, and I write in a different way. I also choose different subjects, in the sense that most of the television plays are about the North. Someone said that I write horses-for-courses and I couldn't decide whether this was an insult or a compliment. I am getting interested in the form of television: I tend to write in a naturalistic form and don't want to. That was partly why I liked the use of music and voice-over in *Miss Prothero*, because perhaps it's a way of getting away from that.

The television pieces may be more directly biographical, but I can see that the theatre is biographical in a different way. It seems contemporary, but I realise when I've written it that it's often to do with the past. The North I write about is something I knew... we left Leeds in 1966 and I've never known the reconstructed cities as they are now except when I've gone there to film. The North of the clubs is not something I know at all; working men's clubs as I remember them were very dreary places like Irish pubs, not these great jazzy places. On the other hand that's the sort of atmosphere Stephen revels in. He finds it evocative and has a romantic attitude to it which I don't share.

The good thing about Brian Tufano is that he doesn't make a great mystery of camerawork. He's highly skilled and very quick setting up shots, but he does explain it to you. Often when I've been filming the cameraman is somebody slightly apart. Brian isn't like that, I suppose because he's interested in directing. On *A Little Outing*, the first film he directed, he wanted to shoot it in a very plain way. I would like to try directing, but it would have to be a very simple script. I'd have to work it out with pictures on paper—I don't understand about 'crossing the line' and all the basic things.

I've written two unmade film scripts: a comedy called *The Vicar's Wife* which was written ten years ago, and an adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* for John



'Three Men in a Boat': Tim Curry, Michael Palin, Stephen Moore

Schlesinger, which was too expensive apparently. If I did another I'd just regard it as a long television script. But the problems of setting it up are so complicated that you can end up with nothing. My experience is that most people who make films, the best people, aren't doing it for money. There must be some way of organising a system where everybody is in the act, a system of fair shares. You would do it much more economically than now, where everybody insists on their rights: we must have five minutes to walk to and from the pub, is that included in the lunch hour? Are we going into overtime now? It sours the atmosphere and produces bad work, and if it produces bad work it's a bad system.

Brian Tufano

Brian Tufano's photography has probably received more critical attention than that of any other television cameraman. His work is notable for his ability to match his images to the setting of a film as well as to each director's individual visual style. He has collaborated with most of the BBC's top directors and his work includes Jack Gold's *Stocker's Copper* and *The Gangster Show*, Ken Loach's two-part *The Price of Coal*, Alan Parker's *The Evacuees*, Alan Bridges' *The Lie* and four films by Stephen Frears (*Play Things*, *Sunset Across the Bay*, *Daft as a Brush* and *Three Men in a Boat*). He has also directed two half-hour television films: *A Little Outing* and *Rehearsal*. Tufano has now left the BBC, after 21 years, to work as a freelance cameraman.

I've just done my first feature film, Jack Gold's *Sailor's Return*, and I wouldn't say it was over-crowded at all. The crew is bigger than a television film crew, but I found that I was able to concentrate more on the photography rather than worry about all sorts of other things, as you tend to do when

you're working for a television company. But the problems are similar in both media. Whereas with the BBC, on some of the big films we'd have, say, 20 days to shoot, with a smaller crew and a budget of about £100,000, on *Sailor's Return* we had, I think, £400,000 and six weeks. All we'd done was to take the same problems on to a bigger scale. You still had to get it done in that time and for that money, still fighting the same pressures. Shooting on 35 mm is slower than shooting on 16 mm simply because of the actual physical business of moving the equipment around.

Of course, there are differences between television and feature film shooting, but in a sense they are petty differences, and the reasons are convenience and cost. In the same way, the whole construction method of set building is different. Film sets are built to look more realistic; we had sets built in an aircraft hangar so that we were close to the exterior location, and if the weather changed we were able to move inside immediately. The sets were built of wood, plaster, cement and old beams which the construction manager found in derelict barns. But even though the whole thing had the proper textures and shapes, one was still able to float walls in and out, so that Jack Gold could bring the camera in from whatever angle he wanted. On television one had to put up with things like pressed plastic sheets of brick stuck on flats which were held up by stage props.

Stephen Frears is the sort of person who is pushed outwards by the encouragement he gets from people like his key technicians. His brain is so alert that if you suggest something, even if it might not be what he's thinking of, he can immediately see the value of it and how it will fit into the narrative. We worked together for about eighteen months—four films, one after the other—and we built up a

working relationship where we were able almost to talk to each other without saying anything. For example, we went on a recce for *Daft as a Brush*, and I just said to him that I thought visually this film ought to be grey dry-stone walls, the type one finds in the Yorkshire Dales, and he said that was exactly it. He knew exactly what I meant and that was the sole preparation we gave to the visual interpretation of the film.

On *Three Men in a Boat* Stephen said, 'I don't want to be restricted to filming off the banks of the river, i.e. right-to-left or left-to-right. I want total freedom to film as if it were on dry land.' I said, 'In other words, you want to be able to track along with the boat from another boat but you also want to be able to track down the length of the boat as both boats are tracking down the river!' He said, 'That's the problem, you've got to work out how to do it.' All sorts of things came to my mind, like using a low-sided barge, but barges weighed 50 tons and took hours to manoeuvre.

We eventually cracked it by using some incredibly botched-up bits of equipment which were obviously never designed for that particular job but which worked. I designed it all around a pantograph arm, which is used mostly in TV studios for lowering the lights automatically from the roof. I had a special rig made which took the camera and then I got a very low boat which had been used for a commercial in which a Mini was floated across a lake—it was about 17 feet long by 8 feet wide, virtually a wooden box about two feet deep. I had a scaffolding built, like a big cage, and this pantograph arm was able to come up and down on rollers and travel along the scaffolding rail. Then I had parallel arms put out at front and back of this camera boat, as we then called it, so that we could fix the other boat to us. It was a combination of tracking and hand-holding—I just moved along the boat and was able to take out a lot of the river movement. The crunch came when Stephen told me he wanted to shoot the film where it happens in the book. All the technical problems he'd set were nothing beside the problems of doing *Three Men in a Boat* on our budget in three weeks, starting at Kingston and going up to Oxford, directly under the flight path of London Airport—and all on the River Thames in the middle of summer! That's one of the contradictions of Stephen, he says he's frightened to try anything and then he throws out a challenge like that.

I've spent a lot of time in the cutting rooms, not as an editor but mainly with Ken Pearce (who cut a lot of Stephen's work), just learning how it all went together. It's only when you get back into the cutting room that you learn whether the timing and the balance are right and if the whole thing is going to come together. Even the lighting cameraman doesn't know what's going on in a director's mind and the problems he faces until he actually does it himself. I'd never had any aspirations to direct: the *Premiere* series [see SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1977/78, pp. 27–28] was producer Innes Lloyd's idea. He obviously saw something in me I wasn't aware of. I wanted to do something about old people and I thought Alan Bennett was the best writer on that particular subject. I worked with Alan closely for about twelve months and *A Little Outing* gradually came into being. I really don't have any style of

photography, any particular way of lighting: when I set out as a cameraman the one thing in my mind was that the photography should be unobtrusive, should go along either parallel with or secondary to the narrative. But in a sense I failed because people did notice.

I'm hoping to direct another Alan Bennett play; unfortunately, it won't be a film. But I found the television studios very exciting. As a director—having only directed two things—I felt I could get more into the characters in the television studio than I could on film—somehow one felt closer to it. I would like to photograph more cinema features. But having left the BBC and gone freelance, I've thrown myself out into the cinema market. And then there's a whole new field for me—shooting commercials.

Chris Menges

Trained in documentaries, where he still does much of his work, Chris Menges has photographed three cinema features: *Kes*, *Gumshoe* and *Black Beauty*. His deliberately hard-edged visuals make maximum use of natural light and can be either realistic or expressionistic as the subject requires. His recent documentary films include *A Family Doctor*, *Wild and Free Twice Daily* (as director); *Chicago Streets* and *Busker* (as photographer). For Stephen Frears he has shot *Gumshoe*, *Last Summer* and his new film, tentatively titled *The Innocent*.

When we started *The Innocent*, Stephen Frears told me he was very concerned to get close to the people in the story. That's about all he said but it gave me the whole conception of how to photograph it. It comes from my training in documentaries, where you go to the house where you're filming, sit down, talk, absorb atmosphere and try to get the people to dictate to you how to photograph them. It's no good making a documentary in which the camera dominates the shooting, or there's only your solution and you intrude. Stephen is good to work with because he doesn't try to tie you up in knots, he gives you a certain amount of freedom and also ideas from which you can build.

I recently went to see Vittorio Storaro, Bertolucci's cameraman, filming *Agatha* with Michael Apted directing. He's one of the most innovative cameramen alive—I don't think many of our British cameramen, though technically brilliant, achieve his kind of photography: always on the edge of a sword, one mistake and you slip off. He lights very much how I try to light and uses the camera in a way that I would like to do. It is extraordinarily dynamic, the camera becomes almost a character. Stephen is among our top few really talented directors but he has never had the time, i.e. the budget, to be free to do what they're doing on *Agatha*. They'll spend three months shooting, spend several million dollars, and they can afford to do just two shots a day.

I do take risks, and that's why perhaps as far as certain tele-cine operators and editors are concerned I'm not popular. But I remember doing a television film for Ken Loach, *After a Lifetime*, where we had a quality control boss from head office on the location in Liverpool dictating to us that we

should use a certain exposure to get the high contrast, etc. In a sense that has plagued me. But I want to remain vulnerable because I want to stay on the edge of the sword! It would perhaps be better if we had more time to do things; I can't compromise any more than I do. But this does cause quite a lot of tension between the directors and myself, Stephen included.

I find making documentaries a nightmare because the possibility of everything collapsing on you at any time is 100 per cent. You feel totally exposed on all sides. It's not like a fiction film where you get a good writer, discuss it with the executive producer and if you're confident it's OK, you go; or if it doesn't match up, you withdraw discreetly. I just did a documentary with Ken Loach about some young lasses going for auditions for pantomimes and summer shows, and trying to get into the Ballet Rambert. It's in black and white: we wanted more film than ATV would let us have, so our executive producer said, 'If you haven't got enough colour stock, why not do it in black and white?' Ken and I sat there in amazement—what an extraordinary, and generous, thing for a producer to say; they normally insist on colour. Since *After a Lifetime*, made for London Weekend, Ken Loach has been working for the BBC, and as they won't employ freelance cameramen I have been desperately trying to encourage both Ken and Tony Garnett to work for an ITV company so that we can work together again.

We're now going to do a television film from Barry Hines' book *The Gamekeeper*. It starts as soon as I've finished editing a film I made in Hong Kong, which I think will be quite interesting; it's about an English missionary working with street drug addicts. It's all in Cantonese, and I'm going to subtitle because I don't want to put voice-over in English; I think that respect for the language is part and parcel of respect for filming. It hasn't got a title yet. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a play called *The Flies*, which is about addiction, and I thought I might call it *The Fly on the Wall* because Hong Kong is a fly on the Chinese wall.

Later, if everybody's willing, Tony Garnett is going to produce and Ken Loach direct a film called *Black Jack*—that'll be terrific because it'll get them both back into making cinema films, and I shall have the opportunity to work with the team that risked everything and allowed me, who had previously only operated, to photograph *Kes* for the cinema. For seven years now I haven't worked in the cinema; I allowed certain personal reasons to prevent me working on Ken's *Family Life*. At the time, in desperation I went to Burma for eighteen months to sulk and shot a film called *The Opium Warlords* made by Adrian Cowell, who is a terrific director.

It's extraordinary how television is still in its infancy. It's like a child that's old enough not to use nappies but shits in its pants instead. We've got so much to learn and so much to develop that I think the next few years will be very exciting. In that context, it's very sad that the Fourth Channel is not going to the independent film-makers and freelance technicians to develop their already considerable creative talents. That this won't happen is a total condemnation of the *laissez-faire* attitude of all the networks and, disappointingly, the backward thinking in sections of our film unions. ■

THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE GODFATHER



How does one convey outrage these days without sounding pedantic or shrill? We have bypassed that tone in the effort to elevate films with goodwill. The role of active dislike is nearly in abeyance. At any event, this is a discriminating attack, and I will be as calm as possible with it, even if outrage is upsetting. But to talk about movies is a matter of considering life.

The public is a pill able to reject any germination. Its members regularly perish, but the body maintains its stumbling, life-like progress. The crowd has had to cultivate an impassivity greater than the dismay of its individuals. We absorb trash, the humdrum and masterpieces with sturdy indifference: the critical labels are no more penetrating than the warnings on cigarette packets. TV, the medium that reaches so many more people in a common instant, mocks connections. It has suppressed the individual with its ratings. It has cancelled the prospect of works of the imagination enriching the masses. We know now that the process merely impacts us, dissolving the strenuous duties of personality and responsibility.

The wonderful and the abominable have collapsed together in mutual resemblance. They measure our time and permit the buying of time that sustains TV, a medium in which the chance of enlightenment has passed beyond the disappointment of half-baked information and dispiriting entertainment to become a household monotone, switched on like a light. TV is a domestic service, a distraction from concentration, solitude and company. It removes burdens we hardly recall: to be troubled or pleased, to be ourselves.



I am trying to deal with *The Godfather*. It is no longer necessary to specify which of the two parts. TV has amalgamated them, just as it does the volumes of *The Forsyte Saga*, the tableaux of *Civilization* and its own daily ingredients—news, drama, comedy, sport, movie, commercial—until they are all chiefly things seen on the box, different complexions of the screen's haze. TV is a liquid in which the sediment of cell life is in perpetual motion, tormenting earlier cultural expectations, such as narrative, understanding and moral sensibility.

I am talking about the two films made by

David Thomson

included among these glamorous, dead machines, so that it is not surprising if the camera's product suffers from the same lustrous suppression of vitality.



detail of gravity and consequence that are never explored because the show must go on.

It is the rhetoric of marketable impact, and it is like a good aircraft, the manufacture of the atom bomb, aerosol deodorants or guaranteed pills. Such things teach our senses inertia (it is necessary to be very cool to fly in a 747 without frenzies of delight or fear, and pills take risk away from actions that ought to be felt as perilous). Such toys and conveniences have a cute efficiency, as detached from any creative personality as *The Godfather*. Of course, cameras must be

From a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, November 11, 1977—Pacino's blank saint's face and the massive headline: 'The Godfather as you've never seen it!': 'Starting tomorrow—and continuing for the next three nights—NBC will broadcast one of the major presentations of this or any season.* It is called "Mario Puzo's *The Godfather: The Complete Novel for Television*". For the first time viewers will have the opportunity to see the Godfather story told in chronological

* NBC has not yet claimed that any of its programmes are not worth seeing.

'The Godfather': left: Sonny (James Caan) in the gutter; below: Michael Corleone (Al Pacino)

Francis Ford Coppola, which seemed to me on the larger screen a landmark of personal work emerging from the industrial context. Part I had everything except the Buñuel who might have intertwined baptism and gangland *coup d'état* with barbed-wire ribbons. Coppola regarded that compromise with a pained, straight-faced acceptance which now seems fundamental to the entire work. Perhaps he hoped that his inability to take a stance at the end would be read as irony or ambiguity; perhaps he never realised his own predicament. For all his sophistication, there is something guileless in the work and glib pleasure at the smooth machinery of slaughtering rivals intercut with the baptism liturgy. Francis enjoys the sardonic timing as much as Michael does, and may be as unable to see the human consequences that it veils.

Still, *The Godfather* had the apparent virtue of the best American films: it did not cheat its own compulsive melodramatic energy. Paramount required a wholehearted climax, and Coppola's straight face was too intent on mechanics to handle disintegration. Coppola is misled by expressive perfection; he thinks it alters or places the human situation being treated. The American movie has never dealt with doubt, without the nullifying excuse of self-pity or madness. Its dramas work like trustworthy engines: the gravest flaw of *Citizen Kane* is that Welles cannot abandon his immature satisfaction with neatness—everything fits, works and hums. The director has fallen for Kane's debilitating ambition: to have the people think the way he tells them to think. American heroes are as convinced as scripts, schedules and release patterns imply. They accomplish and achieve; even the alienated, dying Kane initiates an elegant riddle.

Just as Michael Corleone ended that first part secure, so Coppola had a brimming hit. I doubt if anyone in America, let alone Hollywood, hated or disapproved of him—that is a measure of his negligible risk; it also reflects the sweet poison of the product. In its brief time, *The Godfather* was the biggest grosser ever, and that easily overlooked the grossness of its own pusillanimous ending. *The Godfather* was filled with a kind of superficial dynamism that *Kane* first identified, and which has been the beacon for the intelligent pic trade ever since: it is sensational narrative powered by the hush and



order. The keynote of the nine hour presentation will be the first television showing of "The Godfather, Part II" plus important film never-before-seen on any screen! . . . The entire production has been personally—and masterfully—reshaped for television by the man who directed . . . both "Godfather" movies, Francis Ford Coppola. He has been able in this new form to achieve a sense of continuity and scope that simply could not be realised in a theatrical presentation.'

Then, in far smaller type, at the foot of the page, this grim waiver couched as solicitude: 'PARENTAL DISCRETION ADVISED'. Has anyone adding the phrase ever wondered about the actual processes comprising parental judgment? Does anything else in TV help nourish it? Or is it simply the slick escape of the medium from the implications of offence and distress, as opposed to the reckless envy that will go out and buy? Did anyone pause to reflect how far *The Godfather* is a devout study of the efficacy of cruel parental discretion? Or is the skirting of real parental care only part of the pessimism that supports the inhumane patriarchy of *The Godfather*?

The network hype has the language of critical judgment, no matter how inflated, but parental discretion so advised is the cowardly side-stepping of any fixed attitudes towards TV's own materials, part of the irresponsible orthodoxy: 'We just carry these programmes . . . you can always turn off . . . the views expressed in this programme are those of the contributors, not the station.' 'Parental discretion' is usually invoked to excuse acts of violence, sexual passages and what is called profane language. No one ever advises it in the total matter of watching TV or not, or of submitting to the systematic fragmentation of all programmes, with the aromatic, expansive glue of commercials: *The Godfather*, say, interrupted and sticky with the unambiguous lyricism of pizza, spaghetti sauce, tomato paste and olive oil—the staples that made a legitimate business for the Corleone family. Perhaps they also perfected a competitively priced paste that could be sold to the movies for a trouble-free and non-cancer-causing blood?

**'There is a good deal of blood in
Pierrot.'**—Cahiers du Cinéma
'Not blood, red.'—Jean-Luc Godard

'In other words I covered in the shooting every aspect of the killing. Actually some of it was shot in slow motion. I had the camera slow and the girl moving slowly so that I could measure out the movements and the covering of awkward parts of the body, the arm movement, gesture and so forth. I was actually seven days on that little thing; it's only forty-five seconds really.'—Alfred Hitchcock

Francis Ford Coppola is an American success story. Everyone loved him for his very rapid transit from film school, Corman quickies and off-the-cuff nudies to the prestige, epic panorama and box-office green ones of *The Godfather*. It was tactful of him to fill that jumbo sandwich with the poised paranoia of so 'difficult' and 'unconventional' a film as *The Conversation*, in which blood gushes

back from the toilet in a traumatic plumbing malfunction. As he finished *Godfather II*, Coppola spoke to *Film Comment*. It is a statement of dreamy contentment, decorated with all the ways of sticking kindly arrows in Jack Clayton's fudging of Coppola's script for *Gatsby*—which is easy to credit, even if so many fond mentions of Clayton and humble deprecations of how little a writer does smack of a mafia kiss.

But in that interview Coppola rejoined in the big bucks of Part I, the freedom he had won for Part II and the limitless vistas that confronted the movie world's new Don: 'I'm not *that* rich, but I'm gettin'. I had to go through a lot of agonising decisions because I can always say why don't I just go and make money. I could sit down and write the most commercial movie ever made. I feel I could pull it off. Just make a hundred million dollars and spend the rest of my life . . . I'm now thirty-five and that's what I thought I was doing with *The Godfather* and then with *Godfather II*, I was making a film that would also appeal to an audience. At some time you've got to cut off and say, "O.K. I've made enough money."'

**'This contempt for money is just a
trick of the rich to keep it from the
poor.'**—Michael Corleone

By 1976 Coppola was no longer so relaxed. The project that he eventually moved on to, *Apocalypse Now*, was proving as much of a white man's grave as its subject, the Vietnam war. Immense difficulties of scripting, casting, finding locations and military assistance and of violent weather were hindering the picture. *Apocalypse When?* it has been called in the past year, during which George Lucas and Steven Spielberg slipped past Coppola in the championship for best bankable movie-maker. Way behind schedule, the picture will not open now until the autumn of 1978, and only then if Coppola can fashion something commercially coherent out of 1.5 million feet of film. Perhaps it will prove as glib and catchy as *Star Wars*, but it may be a Xanadu—sprawling, untidy and housing a monstrous study of human nature too awkward to swallow. That might turn Coppola into something more than a smart student; nothing as yet indicates that he knows the feelings of loss or failure.

Whatever that outcome, it was in the time of *Apocalypse* that Coppola was called on—personally and masterfully—to reshape *The Godfather* for TV. It was the first time that a director had had an opportunity to reassess a released film.* Part I was televised in 1974, to the largest audience ever for a movie—since surpassed by *Gone With the Wind*. NBC and Paramount immediately worked out a financial deal (reportedly \$15 million) for an eventual amalgamation of both parts that used a chronological format, 'laundered' the violence and language and restored some

* TV may offer more second chances. Scorsese made one *New York* for theatres and another for the small screen. The advantage this offers is clear, but what may it do to the necessary discipline of decision-making? 'You should have seen what they cut' might give way as a defence to 'See it on TV'.

footage cut from the theatrical release versions.

By the time the work came to be done, Coppola was marooned in the Philippines, so that no one can or will say how 'personally' he worked on the TV *Godfather*. Still, who could doubt that this unique opportunity would have appealed to him? No American director could be blasé about the size of the audience, the thrill of national unity—as tempting to film-makers as to presidents—the chronological clarification and, perhaps best of all, the originality of a venture for a man tempted by the trend-setting lead as young entrepreneur of ideas and imagination. Coppola's editor, Barry Malkin, made an assembly of all the possible material, some of which had to be retrieved from the Paramount vaults. In three months, Malkin compiled a 9½-hour version. This was put on videotape so that Coppola could examine and approve it from the jungle.

Much more had still to be done: two hours were cut from Malkin's assembly, and the whole had to be broken into well-formed episodes that would fit the four-night showing. Great care was taken to anticipate the commercial breaks so that they would do the least damage to a structure of self-contained acts. The two men used telephone and telex, and they met on several occasions. In addition, they had to find a framework for all four nights—an aura for the *Godfather* Show—that would bind the series. (It is in the nature of such series that they describe events in which the centre does hold and neither ideas nor principles fall apart—again, the commercial glue acts as DNA.) The TV version testified to the ingenuity and thoroughness of the work, even if Malkin did most of it under Coppola's distracted guidance. By March 1977, 'a version edited to our ideas' was put before NBC.

'All I want is your respect.'—Vito Corleone

'The golden rule with a "commercial" film is that it must never surprise the public except physically. It may draw from the audience cries of terror at the accumulation of murders and disasters, but the audience must not be confronted by any kind of problem.'—Jean Renoir, *My Life and My Films*

And so it rolled, stopping and starting, on the nights 12–15 November, in three 2-hour episodes and a 3-hour conclusion. What can be said about it in the way of regular criticism, as opposed to this diatribe rigmarole?

1. There was an air of well-being in the land. The press admired the emphatic coherence of its new form. Ordinary viewers congratulated one another on having seen it. The ratings were good, if not colossal. It was an event as widely appreciated as *Roots*, the running of *Gone With the Wind*, *Star Wars* or the live coverage of any celebrity's funeral.

2. Only a fool would confirm the extra 'continuity and scope' of the TV version, yet hardly anyone complained at, or seemed to notice, the wearying shortcomings in those very areas. Chronological sequence on TV was obtained at the cost of having to see 6½–7

hours of film over a span of 75 hours with some thirty interruptions in the film-stream for commercials, introductions and wrap-ups. Of course, no one debated the innate merit of chronology as a structure. The theatrical tension of two distinct approaches to the family, the second framing and reflecting on the first, was mutely sacrificed. Yet again the orthodoxy was heeded that films should have a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order. Eighty years old, the American movie is as pledged as ever to the naturalness of story as a way of taming time and alleviating the critical interpretation of history. What does that do to even apocalypse if there is a beginning, a middle, an end, and a rating, for the end? The screen size (on average) was reduced from about 240 square feet to 1½ square feet. An electronic patterning of lines was substituted for Gordon Willis' photography, and the film's haunting contrast of interior gloom and exterior sunshine was more than a TV set could accommodate. By turns, the movie was glaring or obscure; throughout, it was stippled and miniature—a film on a dusty horizon. This was scarcely remarked on: one might reasonably conclude that TV is not watched. It is endured or countenanced, like a climatic medium.

3. The devices used to bind the film were very revealing. There were persistent voice-overs that the film should not be interpreted as a slur upon Italians. On the first night, Talia Shire, Coppola's and Michael Corleone's sister, appeared on camera—reportedly Coppola himself had declined this chore—to say that it would be 'grossly unfair' to let the Corleones represent all Italians. (It would have been wittier if the real, hard-working and conscientious mafia had been cleared, too.) Titles also announced that, despite bloodiness and the ostensibly favourable portrait of the gangsters, this was actually a study of 'the self-destructive effects of crime and violence.* The film was framed every night with a tragically composed close-up of the brooding Michael Corleone, sitting by the ruffled lake where his last brother had been executed, looking into the past and embodying the lonely travails of presidential retreat—Sunset at Lake Tahoe? The TV film was shaped as Michael's testament, the family history seen through his eyes. No matter the listless decadence of Pacino's presence, it became the tragedy of a man who had become malignant trying to preserve his royal line. Every execution and betrayal is justified by his Nixonian urge to keep the thing together. We now expect and trust an Attila of principles, if he struggles with change, breakdown and the indistinct anxieties of our paranoia.

4. The amalgamated work is a saddened but respectful portrait of Michael. It is dark proof of the attractiveness of the villain in the American movie, so long as he is photographed in repose, seen to think before he destroys, and so long as sincerity persuades him to trample on principle. On TV, this was accentuated by the small screen finding close-ups in what once were fuller, theatrical



Coppola's Vietnam film 'Apocalypse Now'

compositions; where sheer space or another person competed with Michael's head; the TV image closed in on his pensive face. When Michael assures Kay that he did not know, we respond to the necessary damage our hero has had to do to honour and himself for the good reason that the film respects poker-faced deceit and is anchored in Michael's insolent look. It never mocks him—there is no humour anywhere in the film—it only shows him. And whatever such balanced film-making shows it implicitly glorifies. That is why Coppola asserts that he has analysed wickedness while the audience of *The Godfather* has aspired to its inner basis of noble sacrifice. The public watches in a spirit of wanting to belong to this family, wanting to share its heroic purpose and its embattled unity.†

If Coppola sought irony, it has been smothered by the romanticism of the American movie: unflawed melodramatic progress and undimmed glamour bestowed on the people. Together, they promote our dominant response: identification, not any sort of detachment. None of the characters has the all-round raggedness of people in Renoir or Rossellini films, for they are all slyly turned towards us for inspection—they have only that one facet. They are sensibilities aware of being seen, and calculating the effect they make upon the spectator. It is a film tradition flanked by politicians and the grinding charm of people in commercials. The politician has been taught by the American movie, and there is a natural association between *The Godfather* and recent

political manners in America. Michael is a grasping vote-seeker; he campaigns with people, instead of mixing with them. Business, the family, stability and development are discreet cloaks for his one ambition: maintained authority.

5. Al Pacino devours the opportunities offered by the role of Michael and makes him the most baleful, depleted father-figure in American pictures. Nevertheless, the figure outweighs the drabness of the man. There has never been a study of such reticent iniquity, and no clearer proof of the way presentational style disarms any intention in the characterisation. Perhaps Coppola deplores and fears Michael, but he cannot find a way of communicating that. The process of showing and seeing a central character, without ridicule, passion or dangerous critical rebuke, is insurmountable. Michael is Satan, but he impresses as a wounded angel; the self-destructive criminality turns into the self-abuse of a lapsed saint. The film is inspired by Michael's self-pity.

Let me mention two things in Pacino's performance, one a moment, the other a motif that lasts three hours. When Michael arrives at the hospital to visit his father he finds the police guards gone. He smells a plot, and with the timid baker, Enzo, he mounts guard on the hospital steps to warn off the coming assassins. A black car loiters and then drives away in frustration. Enzo's nerves are in tatters and he fumbles a cigarette into his mouth. Michael's own steady hand lights it for him. The new-found Medici, revealed by ordeal, notices his own calm with a faraway satisfaction that promises the most cold-blooded of the Corleones. He mentions his nervelessness to no one else in the picture, but we see it: it is one of those privileged moments of communion between a lonely character and the anonymous crowd—as when Kane whispers his enticing clue,

* I am reminded of the way Hawks' *Scarface* stops its headlong delight in Tony Camonte for a lecture scene telling us what an unwholesome fellow he is. That scene was a concession to censoriousness, and when we sneer at it we are collaborating in the denial of any standards.

† *The Godfather* contains group scenes of a natural warmth and intimacy that are immensely affecting. They may be the scenes in which Coppola is most revealing of himself—he is an ardent family man. In contrast, the alienation of *The Conversation* seems so deliberate and earnest.

knowing that there is a link between our attention and curiosity and his hope to explain himself.

Moments later, the fragile Pacino is beaten by Sterling Hayden's crooked cop (a character of nearly amiable viciousness who is made so much more hateful and coarse than Michael's shy Iago). Michael's face swells immediately and a dark bruising stays there for months. Equally, Pacino's childlike speech lisps all the more with the intimation of a broken face, and his fretting hands are often up to guard or cushion it. The bruising never fades. It spreads through the whole face, like the fatigue of someone too suspicious to sleep. The moment of establishing himself also sets off the gradual degradation of his character: as a creative design it is brilliant, but not enough to rise above the passive, beseeching pain that Pacino projects. Even at the end he is a morbidly sentimentalised version of the pathetic waif Vito who came to America with a shipload of immigrants.

6. There is an undeniable pleasure with the TV version in collecting those moments reclaimed from the out-takes. Our family loyalty treasures every incident in the scrapbook: the discovery that the young Hyman Roth was once employed by Vito Corleone; a glimpse of that girl, ruined by Johnny Fontane, and cherished by the movie mogul; vengeance on the Sicilian guard who caused the death of Apollonia; a moment when Michael and his guards stop during their Sicilian ramble, and the guards beg him to tell them stories about America; Frankie Pentangeli remembering the old ways at the first communion of Michael's son, and surreptitiously teaching the boy to drink wine; and Kay and Michael in bed together when Michael might have been with the family. This last detail lays the subtlest hint of his guilt being associated with Kay. She will be his wife, and the instrument he uses to provide a dynasty, but she presents a challenge to his single-minded family loyalty. She is the only outsider in the film not treated with contempt, killed or ignored—and it is a very perilous status.

7. She is also the figure around whom a greater film might have been made; she is the only person who questions the Corleone ethics and who stands for an alternative, if sketchy faith in people. Diane Keaton was quoted amid the fuss of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* as saying that in *The Godfather* she had felt a kind of stooge, helpless witness to all the scenes enjoyed by the men. How wrong that it only shows the career pressures on an actress of uncontrived benevolence. It also accounts for her feeling bound to try the callous novelty of *Goodbar*. Keaton fits few American stereotypes. Her presence is alive with uncompromising kindness. She is capable of playing a decent person in any film honestly committed to human values. The comparison I think of is with Ingrid Bergman in the Rossellini films.

As it is, in *The Godfather* she has wonderful moments of pain, crushed innocence and humiliation that her dignity endures: Tom Hayden turns her away without Michael's address; the black beetle Michael returns from Sicily and claims her for a street walk, with a chaperoning car of bodyguards prowling behind, reminding us of the village women who attended his courting of Apollonia—a marriage he never mentions to

Kay. She is excluded from the inner chamber at the end of Part I and heartbroken at leaving her children. This is the one act of moral courage in the film, and if illusionist realism was the only mode open to Coppola then it should have been expanded and Kay made central.

Imagine our perception of the Corleones if it came through her eyes—not remarkably intelligent or refined, but capable of being appalled, dependent on a man yet loathing his acts. Kay's dissent could be crucial, but it would have sent the audience away in their millions. Imagine, too, a possible development of her part: suppose that she cut across the half-hearted antagonism of police law and mafia order and uttered a cry of abused nature—of life itself, rather than the methodical business of Murder Inc. That might leave Keaton's Kay as vulnerable and moving as Bergman in *Europa 51*. Then it would no longer be possible to feel such reverence for the Corleones.

Could Coppola have conceived and tolerated an ending in which Kay informs and is ordered dead by Michael, or would that have infringed on the property of Puzo and Paramount, as well as the comfort of the audience? The Corleones require a quite contrary opponent, not rival hoodlums. They are the body and spirit-snatchers of American cinema; only the mechanisms of impersonal style in movie-making have made them admirable. But that hypothetical film would be as disturbing as *Europa 51*, and much less 'viable' than *The Godfather*.

'It's not personal, Sonny—it's strictly business.'—Michael Corleone

'I think I'm a good director. I felt that especially in this last picture, *Godfather II*. I think it's really beautifully directed. Maybe I think that because I feel, "Jeez, I got all these nice performances and it's really fantastic looking and it works—it goes together."—Francis Ford Coppola

'If history's taught us anything it is that we can kill anyone.'—Michael Corleone

'You know, I took my kid to see a forty-five minute assembly of some of the stuff of the old *Godfather*, and I said what parts do you like better? He said, "I like when the guy gets shot." Everyone is like that. Even when you're shooting the film. The second you're going to do a throat cutting or something, everyone including the crew crowds around.'—Francis Ford Coppola

Perhaps it is forlorn criticism to wish that Rossellini had directed *The Godfather*—though he would have called it 'The Age of the American Mafia', moving attention and questions from the genteel spider to the web of circumstances that form him. Nor does the juxtaposition of things written and spoken by Coppola deny that he is a respectable ring-master, a Hollywood ideal. *The Godfather* is the work of a deft engineer at putting a dreadnought together, but a man unaware how the process of that film works. Paradoxically, that is only possible in a system brought up on the simple-minded

notion of pure film, detached from meaning, life, society and the thoroughly impure personality of an author.



The Godfather is a supreme American film, but it is not good enough. Worse than that, it resists the potential that makes all imaginative work hopeful: that the public may pursue a more searching sense of themselves and their lives. Coppola's film is a fantasy that urges us to be less concerned with our real experience. It is part of the American movies' mythology that experience is as private as fantasy. The loss of individual integrity allowed by this leads to the blurred mass of millions that constitutes both the success and the meaning of *The Godfather*: the reassured audience—confirmed in its dreadful nihilism—is the model for a public placid about its own powerlessness to resist authorities.

One must be harsh with Coppola because of his lack of vulgarity. Tastefulness is easily mistaken for worth. He is thoughtful, clean and pretentious; he wants to make a righteous critique of the mafia, not a gangster movie. If he could settle for a simpler target, the film might be wilder, more personal, more touched by poetry—*White Heat*, say, or *Baby-Face Nelson*, pulp works glowing with energy and vitality, and as funny as they are fearsome. *The Godfather* is so weighed down with the wish to be classy, dramatically precise and socially significant, that it is empty of creative passion. It has only entrepreneurial force and reliability—like the bombs, the aircraft and the aerosols. Its most prominent personality is the narcissistic and anal Satanism permitted in the moodiness of Al Pacino; not even its villainy is generous or outgoing—discretion is everything.

But this respectability is as much a cultural failure as it is in Buñuel's bourgeoisie. It is the blind eye of the American film, condoning the starriness of its central figures and turning the subject into a monstrous fantasising melodrama. We long to be with the Corleones: they are samurai or Arthurian knights standing on watch for threatened values and defending them to the death, including the death of value. The blind eye is like the face of every Hollywood star who pretends to be unaware of the camera taking the close-ups that will win the hearts of the audience. The realism required for the proper treatment is not photographic or a test of art direction. It hangs upon the attitude of the film-maker—it could be the humane scrutiny of Rossellini or the scorn of Buñuel. It cannot be Coppola's meek complicity. He does not appreciate how far the approach of a skilled mechanic honours the Godfather's code.

As for the public, we have abided by *The Godfather's* Stalinist implications, without knowing if there is really a mafia. Perhaps no one credits those sinister figures more than the people who make and see films. Movie mafia are the creatures of our insecurity and paranoia—we wish for resolute fathers and comprehensive organisations in what often seems a chronically scattered, undesigned world. To admire the Corleones, to digest their melodrama and the commercials in the same meal, is part of our cultural breakdown, and a symptom of our longing for some domineering conspiracy. It is a movie for those who prefer to live in darkness.

In The Picture

Waiting for Wilson

Sir Harold Wilson has never disguised his satisfaction with his role as rescuer of the film industry in the late 1940s—he set up the NFFC; he has claimed the Eady Money scheme as his own invention. And the film industry, in turn, has shown an almost touching confidence that, nearly thirty years and a political lifetime on, Wilson can get it right again. A dinner at Downing Street led to the swift assembling of the Prime Minister's Working Party on the Future of the British Film Industry, which reported in December 1975. Since then, however, events have moved at a more deliberate pace, making one doubt whether Mr. Callaghan shares his predecessor's special concern with film matters. The Interim Action Committee, chaired by Sir Harold Wilson, was a long time in getting off the mark; and in January 1978 an Interim Committee could still only manage an interim report.

'The position of the British film industry,' says the report, 'has deteriorated even further since ... December 1975. Legislation is now even more urgently needed to establish a British Film Authority.' Reasonably enough, the Interim Committee has at this stage provided some groundwork for the necessary legislation, leaving to a later report 'a variety of important matters'—presumably about television and cinema films, and the relations between different sectors of the industry, and the problems that must have been so thoroughly aired in the evidence the committee has received, including questions of future technological developments.

The plan, as put forward, is for an Authority with a membership of 'not less than seven and not more than nine,' of whom at least two would be people involved in the 'film community' and at least one 'a person having a particular concern for the interests of the consumer.' The Authority would have a part-time chairman and a full-time chief executive, and would be guided in its work largely by a range of advisory committees, on which film people would serve. One such committee, it is stressed, 'should be so constituted as to establish a close and continuous working relationship between the Authority and the television organisations.' These committees will advise the Authority, and the Authority

in turn will act as 'the principal advisory body to the government on all matters relating to film.'

In effect, the Authority, if and when set up, will take over the responsibilities now carried out by the National Film Finance Corporation, the British Film Fund Agency and the Cinematograph Films Council, as well as the film functions of the Department of Trade. It is estimated that its annual operating expenses would be in the region of £500,000, but since roughly half of this represents existing NFFC and Department of Trade costs, it might be regarded as cheap at the price—offering a chance to bring all the odds and ends of film aid and administration under one roof, and giving film people, through the various committees, a significant part in running the show. Left out, incidentally, would be censorship: there is no intention of trying to bring the BBFC under the Authority's umbrella.

The report makes several non-controversial but useful suggestions,

many already familiar from the Terry Report. It would like to see a new agency established to promote and sell British films abroad (the rather unappealing name 'Unibrit' has been suggested). It wants more statistics about the film business—an area in which this country lags well behind some of its European partners. There are references to the needs of 'short films, including animation films', 'films of outstanding artistic merit' and specialised cinemas. And the committee recommends that it should be a condition of a film's registration that a print should be offered to the National Film Archive for permanent preservation, except in cases where this might cause serious problems for the distributor (when, for instance, he imports only one or a few prints). On key issues, however, the report is by no means specific. Does the Eady scheme, for instance, now need a major overhaul if it is to act as a genuine incentive? What would be the criteria for supporting films of 'artistic merit'? And what of the problems presented by the whole growing independent sector in film-making?

How soon we are likely to get the Authority remains problematical. There is, as Sir Harold pointed out, no parliamentary time in the present session. How much money the Authority would have to operate with remains another open question, though £5m is the sum previously suggested for Government aid. And, as the Association of Independent Producers has pointed out, the major problem of film distribution gets little attention. There is also the question of ministerial responsibility. The Interim Committee follows the Terry Report in suggesting that the 'art' (Department of Education and Science) and 'industry' (Department

of Trade) approaches to film should be unified; and Sir Harold Wilson's own view is that there should be a minister of Cabinet rank with responsibility for arts and cinema. (The British Film Institute and the National Film School would be answerable to the Minister, as they are at present to the Department of Education and Science, but maintain close contact with the Authority.) Where would this leave television and broadcasting, which at present come under the Home Office? The Report preserves a correct, diplomatic silence.

The problems of British films, and the problems for British film-makers, are gloomily familiar: they are the problems of sustaining creative talent, getting films planned and into production and on to the screen, and looking ahead to a time when technological developments inevitably alter present industry patterns. What is less often taken into account is that the 'film industry' covers many activities other than features. There is, for instance, an annual investment of some £35m in commercials, which appear to be flourishing. There is all the laboratory side of the industry. It's useful to be reminded that this is a bigger industry than we tend to think, and that not all of it is suffering.

At the press conference to launch the report, Sir Harold Wilson did not radiate optimism, preferring a more guarded assurance that the problems of the industry were 'not insoluble'. The film industry is difficult, contentious, often self-destructive, and although the Authority should make administration easier, in itself it is likely to be a piece of machinery rather than a driving force. If the Interim Committee really intends to get into the difficult areas of policy postponed from its first report, it's to

Interim action: Sir John Terry and Sir Harold Wilson at the press conference to launch the report. Photograph: Keystone





A rather unlikely cricket team on location for *'The Shout'*, which will be Britain's entry at Cannes. John Hurt, Tim Curry, Robert Stephens, Alan Bates and (standing, centre) the director, Jerzy Skolimowski

be hoped that it can complete its discussions quickly. In any case, early reactions from the Department of Trade suggest that there is plenty of work still to be done before the Authority becomes a reality. At the press conference, Sir Harold indicated that he would take a paternal or godfatherly role; he was not interested in becoming its first chairman.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Wiseman on Polemic

The penalty, for a documentary filmmaker, of crediting one's audience with enough intelligence to draw their own conclusions about the situations shown in a film, is that of coming under attack as a liberal who isn't prepared to take a stand on the issues. When I raised this point with Frederick Wiseman, during his visit to the 1977 London Film Festival with *Canal Zone*, he took pains to refute such accusations by detailing the thinking that has led to his present approach.

With his first film, *Titicut Follies*, about a hospital for the criminally insane, Wiseman was consciously trying to bring about immediate change, an attitude he has not brought to his later films. 'I naively thought that all you had to do was show people how horrible a place was and something would be done about it. I learned from *Titicut Follies* that this is not the case. You tend to think that the film is going to be a singular and isolated event in the lives of the audience, while in fact of course people get information from a variety of sources, have a variety of

experiences, and may not be swayed, as passionately involved or as interested as you are. While you like to think they will use the information you provide as you want them to use it, they are of course free to use or not use it in any way they want.'

The film-maker's responsibility then becomes one of providing the viewer with the fullest possible information. 'Whether successful or not, the effort has been to make the film as complex a statement of the reality of a situation as possible. Even that of course is a simplification. But I don't deliberately set out to simplify an issue in order to reach the masses, because I don't have that kind of view of how simple-minded the masses are, nor do I think of myself as someone who has to teach the masses the proper way to think.'

Wiseman's success in achieving this complexity is partly measurable in the approval his films have gained from their subjects. 'In only three cases have people who initially gave me permission turned against the film. And in all three instances (*Titicut Follies*, *High School* and *Primate*) they initially liked the film until they were made defensive by the reviews that appeared in print. I don't think of myself as a thesis-oriented spoiler, a muck-raker, and I guess I haven't been so regarded by lots of the people who've been the subjects of the films.' Given some of the incidents shown in such films as *Law and Order* or *Basic Training*, this is a considerable achievement.

Such approval is perhaps in part due to Wiseman's policy of avoiding easy targets. He prefers to film in

establishments which are generally regarded as good examples of whatever institution they represent. 'It's much more interesting to pick a place where the people are trying, because there's really not much point in making it into a film if you pick a situation that everybody knows to be bad. Also, the more complex the subject, the more fun it is to make the film, because it's more of a challenge to try to include that complexity in the film's final form. If you're going to spend a year working on a film, you might as well pick a subject that interests you.'

I mentioned a public discussion following a showing of *Hospital at The Other Cinema*, where I had seen Wiseman stand up to heavy criticism—essentially, I felt, for being insufficiently polemical. He said that he meets such attacks more often in Europe than in the United States. 'I don't really know why, but one possibility is that film students may be more ideologically oriented. That doesn't necessarily mean they know any more, because sometimes what happens is simply a mouthing of clichés.'

'I think *Hospital* is really a very polemical film, but not in the sense that its polemics support any kind of ideological explanation of what goes on in a hospital. I found when I went to the hospital that the doctors and nurses weren't callous or indifferent. That adds another element to the discussion of the issue, if you find the staff are trying and you find that no matter how serious or concerned or sensitive their efforts, what they're accomplishing is in one sense simply the application of band-aids to a major injury.'

'What you see walking through the doors of that hospital are so-called social problems in transition to medical problems. You're seeing the medical consequences of no jobs, no education, bad housing, all the major social issues. There's not really anything the hospital staff can do about that, other than treat them on a case-by-case basis. It's one of the major things the film is about, yet *Hospital* has been criticised for not

being more critical of the staff. Well, if you threw a hundred doctors into that situation it wouldn't make any essential difference. That's a much more depressing view of it, but I think it's a more accurate view than simply going after the hospital staff, as some people with a more specific ideological orientation might do.'

'If you're going to be fair to the people working in these institutions, it seems to me you have to present them in their own terms. I'm not interested in simplifying more than I have to in the interests of some narrower political analysis. I think the effort is to provide a political analysis, but in my terms and not someone else's. Because the final film does represent a theory. The structure of the film is a theory about the events that are in the film.'

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

New Zealand

Encouraged by Australian successes, New Zealand has now set out to establish its own film-making industry. Four features were released in 1977, and were mostly successful with the public. It has yet to be seen whether a nation of three million people, having already lost many of its best film technicians to Australia, can sustain a film industry. For the last fifty years several determined men have tried but with little success; according to some reports, John O'Shea of Pacific Films (who produced two features in the 1960s) is still paying off his lab. bills. Rudall Hayward, who began making films in the 20s, produced a feature in the early 70s, *To Love a Maori*, but had to buy a 16 mm. projector and hire halls in order to get it exhibited. Only when it was obviously attracting audiences did the cinema chains agree to distribute the film.

The New Zealand Government has belatedly set up a Film Commission; it has an initial budget of only \$US100,000. The Government has said that there will not be large-scale backing for film projects, rather that the commission's

Ian Watkin and Bruno Lawrence in *'Wildman'*. Photograph: Roy Murphy



money will be spread around in small amounts for script development and the like. So it is very much still the private investor who will determine whether more features are made; and at the moment these investors are tending to stand back and see what happens.

What has happened so far is that all the films appear to have done well at the box-office. But because of the size of the New Zealand market (only two films, *Sound of Music* and *Jaws*, have grossed more than half a million dollars), it is unlikely that it alone will provide sufficient financial return. The most ambitious film of the year, *Sleeping Dogs*, cost around \$400,000 to make and foreign sales will definitely be needed to recoup that outlay. The producers, Aadvark, brought in Warren Oates as the name star and are hoping that this will ensure U.S. television sales. *Sleeping Dogs* is a political thriller, with a rather improbable story set in a New Zealand which has been taken over by a dictatorship. It has plenty of action and violence and a long chase sequence for which the New Zealand air force supplied fighter planes and helicopters. It opened to mixed reviews but box-office takings equal to some of the Hollywood blockbusters.

The other major success of the year was *Off the Edge*, basically a skiing and hang-gliding film set in the spectacular scenery of the Southern Alps of New Zealand. Michael Firth made the film for \$300,000 and shot it on 16 mm. The crew spent two winters in the Southern Alps but weather allowed filming on only fifty days. Firth ended up with 15,000 feet of film which he edited to 6,900 feet, and then took it to Hollywood where a backer liked it but had it recut by an American editor. *Off the Edge* was nominated in the Academy Award best documentary feature section and has been released in Australia and the United States.

The other two films were very much shoestring budget category, even by New Zealand standards. A group of young film-makers got together and produced a double-feature, *Wildman* and *Dagg Day Afternoon*, for the all-in price of \$100,000. The crew of *Wildman* themselves contributed \$60,000 of the budget in deferred wages and will only get their money if the film makes a profit. The film tells the story of a showman who travels the New Zealand goldfields in the 1890s with a caged wild man from Borneo. The wild man is a fake, of course, and he and the showman frequently change roles. It is a light film and the tight budget shows. It is preceded on the programme by *Dagg Day Afternoon*, built around a popular New Zealand comedy figure, Fred Dagg, played by John Clarke in gumboots and shearing singlet. *Dagg Day Afternoon* is 35 minutes long and was shot in four days, the cast improvising the story very much as in the days of the silent comedies. Both films are very parochial in their humour and cannot hope for interest outside New Zealand.

New Zealand audiences have at least appeared to have enjoyed all these films. Most earlier attempts at features have tended to be



Yves Montand in Joseph Losey's *Les Routes du Sud*. The script is by Jorge Semprun and, as in *La Guerre est Finie*, Montand plays a Spanish Civil War exile. Photograph: Vincent Rossell

embarrassing and awkward affairs which (to judge by revival showings) the public would prefer to forget. Yet this does not diminish the effort made by Pacific Films and its producer, John O'Shea, over more than twenty years. In 1952 he made a feature, *Broken Barrier*, which examined a love affair between a Maori and a European, but it was twelve years before O'Shea could raise enough money to make another film, *Runaway*. This cost a mere \$114,000 but was so self-conscious in its portrayal of New Zealand youth that it failed at the box-office. In 1966 O'Shea had another try with a musical adventure film, and he is still trying. In 1976 it seemed his luck had changed when Goskino of the Soviet Union signed to co-produce a feature about sport with Pacific. By another stroke of bad luck, the African boycott of the Montreal Olympics over New Zealand's sporting policies led to the Russians withdrawing from the project.

New Zealand's main film pioneer died recently after fifty years making films. Rudall Hayward began in the early 20s making two-reel comedies, then progressed to longer films, many of them about race conflict in early New Zealand. Hayward's films treated the Maori with dignity and respect long before the American Western accorded the Indian the same treatment. The film for which he will be best remembered is *Rewi's Last Stand* (1939), about the battle between the Maori and the British colonial army. It is totally convincing, the action sequences are exciting and authentic. Had Hayward been making films anywhere but New Zealand, he might have become a major figure in the cinema.

He suffered throughout his career from lack of money, distributor disinterest, shortage of equipment and the non-existence of a pro-

fessional film community. When sound arrived the equipment was restricted by patent and franchise. It took Hayward two years to build his own sound camera and optical sound system. New Zealand film-making has progressed beyond this frontier stage, but it still faces serious problems. Apart from the size of the market, money is becoming tighter. The two television channels, traditionally the main source of employment for independent film-makers, are themselves in serious financial trouble and it seems likely that the independents will almost certainly be the first to go from programme budgets.

Producer-director Tony Williams believes the only answer is co-production with Australian companies. He has done this with a new feature, *Solo*, a love story set in a New Zealand forest. Williams was cameraman on some of the O'Shea pictures and has obviously absorbed the lessons from those films. In the meantime, it seems that if New Zealand is to have a film industry then it must follow the course of other small countries in that the Government must provide the initial financial base.

ROBIN BROMBY

Young Israelis

'Kajitz' is the Hebrew word for summer, but the letters that make up the word also serve as the abbreviation for 'Kolnoa Jisraeli Tzair', or Young Israeli Cinema. The surprise that such a movement exists increases as one learns that it is not altogether new, that a number of young features have been produced over the past few years, and that a body of shorts, many both formally and politically original, has resulted from a programme of government

subsidy now in its tenth year.

Unfortunately, the movement is anything but popular. The young features barely rate in the statistics just published by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (population 3 million; 151 films made since 1961; average cost of an Israeli feature, £83,000). The best film I saw, Yaki Yosha's *Shalom*, was seen by 1,900 people on its release; Nissim Dayan's *Light from Darkness* by 5,900. The only feature of this group with an audience in five figures is the most recent, Judd Ne'eman's *Paratroopers*, which sold 85,000 tickets. In the case of this relatively low-budget film, an audience of 300,000 would have been enough to cover costs.

What sets these three films apart from the average Israeli product (about ten films a year) is that they are concerned in a critical way with everyday reality, a topic usually relegated to low-grade comedy. In *Shalom* Yosha tells what is obviously his own story, that of a disappointed outsider, a youngster on the fringe of a dying society of bourgeois immigrants but equally unable to adjust to the overbearing self-assurance and military orientation of his own generation. In style this surprising work is half underground and half *nouvelle vague*. Yosha has just finished his second feature, *Rocking Horse*, the story of a 'Yored' (an Israeli emigrant) who returns to make a film in Israel. Again there are autobiographical elements, but the much slicker production carries less of a punch.

Dayan's film is about juvenile delinquents; Ne'eman's is his second in eight years, and is set in the Israeli army (which objected, without avail, to the film's release), telling the story of a put-upon soldier, the classic sensitive soul who can't adjust and finally dies or kills himself. Ne'eman

raises the question of responsibility by showing, in *Rashomon* fashion, the various versions of the death as told by people with conflicting interests.

Israel's most successful producer, Menahem Golan (*Entebbe*) justifies his string of simplistic entertainments set in the ambience of the Eastern Jewish communities (Iraqis, Pakistanis, Yemenites, Moroccans, today representing two-thirds of Israel's population) by assuring me that his 'Burekas' are head and shoulders above the films these people were fed in their countries of origin. True enough. Burekas, by the way, are pastries sold on street corners, all dough and wrapping and not much content. It's also the popular tag for three-quarters of Israel's films.

I am given a variety of explanations for the lack of an intelligent audience. There is no such thing as an Israeli—everyone has either a country or a community of origin, and culturally the thing hasn't jelled; there is no leisure class; daily events provide as much excitement as the average citizen can take. One director told me that film-makers have enough fighting in real life (every eligible male spends a month of each year in the army) and so can't always find the energy to fight for art. And on an average day more than two-thirds of the population is watching television.

For years there have been attempts to break out of the prevailing pattern, with small features earning well-meant nods and no cash at all, and occasionally turning up at festivals. But the only Israeli directors at all widely known are Efraim Kishon and Uri Zohar, both exceptions. Kishon's satires are best-sellers in their original essay form, and in Germany his books have been on the best-seller lists for years. He produces his own films—why not, since German television covers their cost in pre-production deals. *Sallah Shabati*, his first and still his major effort, is best described by its German release title, *Will Exchange Daughter for Flat*. Zohar also came from literature, and his name and fame carried him safely through seven features. Today he has turned religious, a current Israeli fashion, and refuses interviews because of rabbinical studies 'which take up his total time'. A far cry from his 1963 *Hole in the Moon*, one of the few original screen comedies, a kind of Israeli *Hallelujah the Hills*.

There has never been a clear decision here on whether film should be regarded as industry or art, and two ministries divide responsibility for a mixed bag of conflicting legislation, support and subsidy, mostly on the industrial level. Since there is no chance for the Kajitz group in commercial terms, the new government is now threatening to suspend its aid. But 150 film students graduate each year, at least ten promising talents are evident among those who have managed to get short films off the ground, and a new spirit, more realistic and influenced by the political rethinking of the post-Sadat era, is felt among the young. A certain breakthrough has already occurred in television; realistic films

dealing with the major problems (Arabs, borders, war, unity, conflicting origins, poverty) have been made and, often after years of censorship, shown. There has been no public rejection. The young film directors are sure there would be no rejection if reality were approached in the cinema. But to prove it they would require production funds which the present regime seems reluctant to grant.

GIDEON BACHMANN

Days of Heaven

Badlands, Terry Malick's first directorial feature, was shot in 1972, and in a movie era glutted with tales of social banditry and romantic couples on the run, achieved a stunning simplicity and purity of form, while maintaining its roots in the richest soil of local, historical and literary reference. His second, *Days of Heaven*, is due to be released in the United States this spring, and promises the same heady amalgam of naiveté and sophistication—a tale of matter-of-fact strangeness, using the plainness of its story and setting almost as a lightning rod to attract the baroque complications of character and atmosphere.

To some extent, it draws on the same soil as *Badlands*. Set in Texas, where Malick spent part of his youth and which was home for the teen heroine of *Badlands*, its immediate milieu is the huge wheat farms of the area during the harvesting season, which draw streams of itinerant workers from the North (Malick worked on such farms during college vacations). The time is 1916–17, a period which seems to function as loosely and suggestively as the 50s 'thrill' killings of Charles Starkweather which provided the basis for *Badlands*. Its hero is one of the many who flee the steel mills of Chicago, New York and Pittsburgh to work the harvest, and the story becomes another comic-romantic odyssey as he teams up with a young girl, whose voice-over narration, Malick says, will provide not so much a commentary on events as a tangential narrative.

What has most excited Malick is the actress he has found to play the girl—in fact, Linda Manz is not an actress but an articulate 16-year-old New Yorker who looks surprisingly younger than her years and who was found, according to Malick, hanging out in laundromats by talent scouts. Many of her feelings about her own life and experiences have found their way into the voice-over. Talking about this aspect of the film in the sound studio where the narration was being recorded, Malick compared it to *What Maisie Knew*, and explained that what the narration should do is supply another dimension—a breathless, innocent, fairytale ambience that he has not attempted to create in his circumstance, economical images. For the most part, the rest of the film is also cast with non-actors. Richard Gere, Diane Keaton's explosive lover Tony Lapato in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, plays the boy, and smaller parts are enacted by durable Western extra Robert Wilke and by playwright

Sam Shepard.

Although the film's subject matter sounds almost impossibly simple, its creation has apparently been anything but. In order to achieve the particular quality of light he wanted, Malick filmed locations in Alberta, Canada, almost exclusively during the preternaturally long period of twilight. Also, because *Days of Heaven* is, in Malick's words, practically a 'silent picture', at least in terms of dialogue, the construction of the natural soundtrack and the creation of sound effects at the post-production stage has been long and arduous, eased in the end by the use of new computer techniques. Given its slow and careful period of gestation, one might expect Terry Malick's second exploration of obsessional terrain to be as powerful—and unexpected—as his first.

RICHARD COMBS

Hong Kong Centre

Given the relentless commercialism of the Hong Kong film scene, the establishment of a non-profit-making organisation dedicated to promoting the understanding of film as an art form might seem rather fanciful. In fact, the new Hong Kong Film Culture Centre, based in downtown Kowloon, is already assuming solid proportions. The Centre is very much the product of a new awareness among Hong Kong's younger generation of film-makers and enthusiasts, many of whom (like Allen Fong, whose *Song of Yuen-chau-chai* and *Wild Children* were shown at the last London Film Festival) currently work for television. Evidence of this new spirit has also been provided by the privately funded critical magazine *Close-up*, and by the Hong Kong Film Festival.

The Film Culture Centre is designed to accommodate all aspects of film study. Courses currently planned cover film theory and film history, both Western and Chinese, and there are diploma courses in film-making with classes devoted to scriptwriting, editing and direction. Research projects include comprehensive indexes of Cantonese and Mandarin films made in Hong Kong, and a regular news sheet will be published. Undoubtedly the Centre's major task will be the establishment of a film archive, desperately needed in a place where prints, once milked of their immediate commercial value, are still subject to notoriously cavalier treatment. This will be particularly relevant to the precariously under-documented history of Cantonese film in Hong Kong.

The most encouraging point about the Centre's self-imposed brief is that it is so clearly a response to the problems of film in Hong Kong. The film-making courses, for instance, fill the lamentable gap left by the commercial studios, which have been loath to train new recruits or to attempt to raise technical standards. The Centre is also concerned to record and decipher Hong Kong's quite considerable film history, and to engage in the critical debates current in the West. A recent drastic shrinkage of the home market has coincided with a feeling that Hong

Kong cinema needs to be defined in relation to the newly accessible mainland cinema; there is also a need to open channels of communication with Hong Kong's young cinema-going public, as well as with Western audiences.

The Centre is now feeling its way. Funds, it is hoped, will come from membership fees, film classes and screenings; there was a fund-raising premiere of Leong Pu-chih's *Foxbat* in December, and a season of British independent cinema is in the pipeline. Government funds would obviously help, as would a working relationship with the local industry, at least so far as the deposit of prints is concerned.

VERINA GLAESSNER

BFI Award 1977

The British Film Institute Award for 1977 has been made to Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler: A Film from Germany*, premiered at last year's London Film Festival; the award goes to 'the most original and imaginative film introduced at the National Film Theatre during the year.' In four parts and more than seven hours long, *Hitler* forms the climax of Syberberg's series about Germany, the Weimar Republic and the way the Hitler image has loomed over the 20th century. It is also a splendid apotheosis of Syberberg's front-projection technique (developed over several films), with figures, as on a stage, sliding imperceptibly between large cut-outs and other pieces of decor to deliver speeches before retreating behind billowing clouds of multi-coloured smoke. This technique is seen at its most complex in the film's first part, which also boasts an extraordinarily complex soundtrack, mixing voices, music, chants and effects into a contrapuntal whole. Hitler was in us before, during and after the Third Reich is the film's central thesis, and Syberberg makes a particularly ironic point of how Hitlerian doctrines have cut deadly paths through the social fabric of many countries since 1945. Something of a blend of stage spectacle, radio play and magic lantern show, *Hitler* is often indulgent, sometimes verbose and repetitive, but always wholly original. It is due to be shown on BBC Television later this year.

Exceptionally, it was decided to present two Special Awards for 1977. One goes to John Carpenter, whose *Assault on Precinct 13* was shown at the London Festival and confirmed the exceptional promise shown by his earlier *Dark Star* (see interview with John Carpenter in this issue). The other Special Award was made to the Iranian director Sohrab Shahid Saless, whose *Diary of a Lover* was shown at the London Festival following a retrospective of his work in August. Saless, who now works in West Germany, is an uncompromising film-maker whose refined, pointillist style achieves an almost Bressonian simplicity. It is a style which has crossed cultures as well as frontiers; which makes it all the more surprising that not one of his films has yet had a commercial release in Britain.

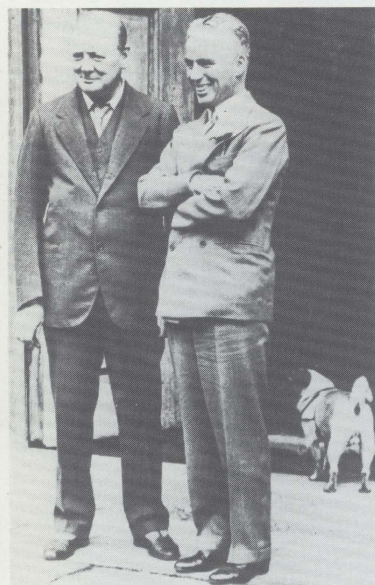
Chaplin as a boy, probably about 1900



A photograph from the 1920s



Visiting Winston Churchill at Chartwell in the 30s



Directing his last film, 'A Countess from Hong Kong' (1966)



CHAPLIN 1889–1977

Chaplin's 'Burlesque of Carmen' (1916)



An undated photograph from the National Film Archive stills collection



FRANCE: The Newest Wave

The crisis in the French cinema which everyone in Paris film circles writes and talks about incessantly is real enough. The hunger for good news was made all too evident by the front page headline in a recent *Le Film Français*: '0.7 per cent More Spectators in the Greater Paris Area in 1977.' Apart from the slight absurdity of excitement over less than one per cent of anything, a closer look at the figures in the article shows that total cinema attendance was down 10 per cent from 1976, and that even in Paris those few additional viewers were watching fewer films.

The many government promises of economic reforms for the cinema industry have remained words only. Fewer and fewer producers are either willing or able to finance any but sure-fire hits, although as film after film fails no one seems to know exactly what a hit might be. The cinema is taxed at 17.6 per cent from a film's opening until its closing, while theatre and musical events benefit from a low tax rate of 2.1 per cent for the first 140 performances and no taxes at all after that. Combined with ever-escalating production costs, such unequal taxation is reflected in excessively high-priced admissions. Television is also helping to keep people away

from the cinema. In 1957, 100 films were shown on the small screen; last year, 517, many of them recent productions. The situation has created a widening gulf between super-productions costing over 3,000,000 francs, and small films which cost under 1,000,000 francs. The former are widely distributed by the three majors: UGC, Parafrance and Gaumont. The latter are fortunate if they find an independent distributor or cinema. Even then, the film often plays off in a week or two to what would appear to be a dwindling audience of cinéphiles.

Those economic aids which do exist seem

to contain inherent drawbacks, and for various reasons have been criticised on all sides. Conservative Député Robert-André Vivien recently stood up in the *Chambre des Députés* to denounce the *Advance on Receipts*—a scheme by which a director is awarded 'seed' money to begin production on the basis of a scenario, the money to be repaid at a set percentage scale from box-office receipts. Vivien claimed that the *Advances* are always given to 'leftist films which attack the ideas the majority of Frenchmen hold dear, to films which make us sad rather than to those which make us laugh, and to films which have such a small potential audience as to ensure the *Advance* will never be paid back.' Even those sympathetic to the idea of the system, which was set up to aid 'difficult films of art and experimentation', complain that those films which do receive the *Advance* acquire such a low commercial reputation that instead of functioning as 'seed' money, the *Advance* sometimes ensures that no producer will even consider the film. Defenders of the *Advance* suffered a setback when it recently came to light that members of the Commission which decides on grants—directors, writers and others connected with the industry—had not only bestowed *Advances* upon themselves for future projects, but all too often had made decisions on the basis of considerations other than the quality of the scripts before them.

Current distribution and exhibition practices are so hysterical that if a film is not at least a 'respectable' success within a week—with an indication from daily admission figures that attendance is on the rise—it is removed from the screens. Such decisions are

Coline Serreau





Sami Frey in 'Pourquoi Pas!'

made on Monday. Since movies usually open in Paris on Wednesday, a film has five days in which to prove its commercial worth. Together with the near-disappearance of second- and third-run houses, this means that unless a film is an obvious hit, you had best see it during the first week of its run, or take the chance of losing your opportunity ever to do so.

Paradoxically, at the same time that the crisis and its concomitant hysteria and depression exist, the French cinema is also showing signs of new creative life for the first time in a decade. I am not suggesting that the French cinema is advancing a New Wave, Part Two, but a generation of directors has come along to infuse creative energy. None of them can yet be called 'major', particularly since we are dealing with many first films made under the worst possible financial conditions, but they are engaged in never less than interesting work, and all are trying to make personal films, attempting to transform traditional form and content, even as some work happily within genres. It is not necessary to 'like' all their work. Indeed in many ways that is irrelevant. Attention, however, must be paid.

Any attempt to discuss them all, especially in a relatively short article, would be foolhardy. Just those names which come immediately to mind will indicate the burgeoning richness and diversity of new French cinema: Claude Miller (*La Meilleure Façon de Marcher*, *Dites-lui que je l'aime*), Pierre Rissient (*One Night Stand*), Benoit Jacquot (*Les Enfants du Placard*), Bernard Tavernier (*Les Enfants Gâtés*), René Ferret (*La Communion Solennelle*), Bob Swaim (*La Nuit de St-Germain des Prés*), Coline Serreau (*Pourquoi Pas!*), Paul Vecchiali (*La Machine*), Christian Bricout (*Paradiso*), Jean-Claude Biette (*Le Théâtre des Matières*), Jean-Louis Daniel (*Trottoir des Allongés*), Philippe Nahoun (*Une Fille Unique*), Diane Kurys (*Diablo Menthe*).

This list is not exhaustive, and the decision

as to which directors to speak to, not only about their own work but about the overall situation of French cinema, could well have been made arbitrarily. Given the proper adjustments for personal tastes and goals, they would all have had similar tales to tell about getting their films made. I spoke to a good many more directors than those represented here, and the similarity between their ideas and opinions of the industry in France was striking. Finally, it made sense to choose an undoubtedly important director who has had one smash hit and one financial failure (Claude Miller), one who has tried to function outside the system by forming his own production company (Paul Vecchiali), one whose first film has just been released (Coline Serreau), and one who is in the process of making his first film, although his experience in other areas of the cinema is extensive (Luc Béraud).

Coline Serreau

Although Paris critics are talking with deserved enthusiasm about Coline Serreau's *Pourquoi Pas!* as a 'stunning directorial debut', the director is hardly a novice to film and theatre. On stage she has played Desdemona, Hermia and Rosalind, as well as roles in modern plays, and has acted on television and played the lead in J-L. Bertucelli's film *On s'est trompé d'histoire d'amour*, for which she also wrote the script. In 1975, she directed a full-length documentary, *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent?*, a thoughtful, non-strident feminist film in which women from various walks of life discuss their ambitions and desires. Interviewed the day before *Pourquoi Pas!* was released in Paris, Coline Serreau was attempting to remain calm and without thoughts of the box-office; an attempt made the more difficult by the enthusiastic reception for the film at its press screenings, and by the news that it had just won both the *Elle* prize and

the Prix Sadoul for the best film of the year by a new French director.

How did *Pourquoi Pas!* come about? How was it financed?

COLINE SERREAU: As long ago as 1974, when I did the scenario for Bertucelli's film, I had the subject in mind as a scenario I could direct. I wrote it in 1975, but I didn't know enough technically about cinema. I got as many books as I could find to study about lenses and so on. Then I did the documentary partly to relearn it all in a practical way. Finally, I did what everyone has to do in France when they want to make a 'small' film, particularly a first film. I took the script to the Commission for Advance on Receipts. It took ages, but I was awarded 600,000 francs. Then I went hunting for a producer. Although she was not the first one I saw, when Michèle Dimitri read the script and we talked about it, she was enthusiastic and wanted to do it. Michèle had been an independent distributor and, although she had great success with films like *Aguirre* and *Kaspar Hauser*, like all independent distributors she worked very close to the break-even-or-bust line. Finally she went out of business, particularly since a film she had produced did not do very well commercially. Now she was ready to start producing again. There was very little money. The total budget was 2,500,000 francs. It was enough, but barely. There were things in the film that would have been better technically if I had had just a little more money. I shot the script as it was written. We didn't have to trim anything away, but sometimes, for example, I had to settle for a zoom when I would have liked to be able to use another tracking shot instead.

Everything in *Pourquoi Pas!* was scripted, then? Sometimes the film has a spontaneous, improvised feel to it.

Everything was written down, and I obliged the actors to speak every line without a change, down to the commas and question marks. If it has a feeling of improvisation, that probably comes from long rehearsals. I'm an actress myself, and I hate to work with directors who don't have a set text. It is hard enough giving a good performance without being called upon to write the dialogue and collaborate on the direction as well. We rehearsed for weeks, working everything out exactly, including camera movements. That also made shooting go faster and saved money. We shot a ratio of about six to one, which seems to me not an excessive amount.

Has the positive reaction to the film surprised you?

It has pleased me, of course, although we will have to wait to see if that reaction is widespread. I am surprised at the *Elle* prize because that is given by the readers, and I shouldn't have thought the readers of *Elle* would have liked the film that much. Obviously, I misjudged them. *Pourquoi Pas!* is about a *menage à trois*, which is not that unusual, but I thought the homosexuality between the two men might upset people, particularly since the men are neither marginal people nor eccentrics. I was fed up with seeing the usual stereotypes in sexual and romantic situations, seeing only 'beautiful' young people, so I avoided the usual pretty faces. Sami Frey, of course, has played the Latin Lover in a lot of films, but now that



Luc Béraud directing 'La Tortue sur le Dos'

he is forty he is more interesting, and I knew he wanted to do other things. He is still very handsome, but we cut through that by having him walk in that odd shuffle, and I chose loose, baggy clothes for him so that he would look a bit thicker.

In spite of the money problems you managed to make your film, and to get it released. Do you find that there are interesting things happening in the French cinema despite the crisis?

Of course there are good things happening. I was not entirely happy with Claude Miller's *Dites-lui que je l'aime*, but he is a good director; I think Maurice Pialat is a wonderful director—in many ways the best we have. There are many people with talent working now. But why should they have to work in spite of anything? Why should they have to find it so difficult to make a film or to mount a play? Creative energy should be used to create, not drained away filling out papers and begging for a few francs. But the problem in French cinema isn't all money and distribution. There are too many people who think they are geniuses, and that it is easy to make a film or do a play with that 'genius'. They have heads filled with intellectual theories, but they don't know one end of a camera from another and don't even suspect that there is more than one kind of lens in the world. They say, 'Ah well, all that technical stuff. I'll just get a good crew and they can handle that.' So we end up with a lot of films that look as if they were made by amateurs. Which they were.

Have you plans for the next film?

My projects are very vague, but I have one major one, which is to leave France. I don't know that things are really better elsewhere, but I have had enough of this system. I was fortunate with the Advance and then in finding Michèle Dimitri, of course, but . . . Anyway, I don't think of myself only as a film director. I want to go on acting in the theatre and in films and on television. I also want to direct in the theatre and to write, and maybe to make another film.

Luc Béraud

On the last day of shooting *La Tortue sur le Dos*, his first feature as a director, Luc Béraud worked quickly and finished a dozen different set-ups within three hours. He clearly knew what he wanted, and the obviously close relationship he had built up with his small technical crew of eleven people, each of whom carried out more than a single function, made it easier for him to get it. He rarely spoke while shooting, preferring instead to indicate instructions with quick hand movements coupled with what sounded like imitation bird calls. Although everyone was in good spirits, the crew seemed to be operating mostly on nervous energy; it had not been a long shooting schedule, but those eight weeks had been difficult. There had never been enough money, and more than once it had looked as if the whole production would have to be cancelled.

A few days later, however, Béraud was relaxed and obviously content. He had begun editing and was pleased with the footage. I commented on his efficiency on the set, and he smiled. 'If that's so, it comes from two facts: this film has been made in my mind several times already; I wrote the scenario with Claude Miller over two years ago, after all. Then, I was an assistant director for a television series, and was first assistant on a dozen films over the last ten years for everyone—Duras, Eustache, Robbe-Grillet, Rivette and, of course, Miller. Being an assistant is good for learning how to resolve problems, although it isn't really a lot of help in knowing how to direct, since an assistant acts on someone else's decisions.'

In addition to the script for your own film, you and Claude Miller also collaborated on the scripts for *La Meilleure Façon de Marcher* and *Dites-lui que je l'aime*, on which you were also assistant director, and you collaborated on the script for Yves Boisset's *Le Juge Fayard dit 'Le Sheriff'*. How does that collaboration

work out between you in practice?

LUC BERAUD: I didn't really collaborate on Boisset's script. It was more or less finished but it had problems. I was merely called in with my little bag of tools to fix the leaky taps. As for Claude and myself, we always know who is going to direct the film. *La Tortue sur le Dos* was written before *La Meilleure Façon*, but then it became a matter of financing, and the Miller film was done first. Then with the success of that, Claude was fairly soon able to do another. It is important to know just who is going to direct a script. I know it was done differently in the old days of Hollywood, but to make a personal film you must have a scenario for a director. Making a film is like pulling your pants down in public. It's good to know who is wearing them.

I spoke to Claude d'Anna the other day and he said that the French cinema, maybe all cinema, was dead, yet it seems to me that the French cinema is beginning to move again for the first time since the New Wave.

Yes, well . . . It is a problem. There are plenty of directors with real talent, especially young directors, and the situation is not so different now from that at the time of the New Wave. There are the same difficulties in finding the right subjects, in launching a personal film, particularly a first film. The solution then is the solution now. Cheaper films. Big budgets lead to the immediate problem of getting the money back. Distributors—and there are really only three in France who control distribution—all but refuse to take smaller films. Really, so much is dictated by distributors and cinema owners, who more and more tend to be the same people. Length, for example. Or colour. You can no longer make a film which is economically viable in black and white, and that is in itself a kind of economic censorship of expression. Still, there are interesting films being made. I prefer to speak of films rather than of directors. I very much like the way *The American Friend* was directed by Wim Wenders. There are also Jean Eustache and Luc Moullet; and Rivette. I liked to work with him, and while I wouldn't cross the room to see some of his films a second time, I would go miles to see *L'Amour Fou* over and over again.

How much did *La Tortue* cost? How was it financed?

The final budget will be 1,400,000 francs. That doesn't include releasing the film, since we don't have a distributor yet, and probably won't have until the film is finished. As for the financing, that is a horror story, but fairly typical, and is probably worth talking about in some detail.

You got 650,000 francs as an Advance on Receipts, didn't you?

I submitted my script twice. It was turned down the first time. Then the committee changed, and I had the title page retyped with another title and re-submitted it. This time it was awarded the money. That is a mixed blessing, because the idea is that you then take the script around to producers with the news that you have an Advance. The producers are immediately suspicious, because the Advance is supposedly only given to 'difficult' films. Even if you can find one, a producer will try to trim from the script

anything that might cost more than he is willing to spend, so the Advance suddenly looks like a major portion of the budget. Crowd scenes go, night scenes go; then the shooting schedule is cut in half. After two years of running from one producer to another, spending a fortune in telephone calls and another fortune in having the script typed and retyped for submission, I finally decided to produce it myself. Fortunately, I had savings earmarked for the co-financing of a film some day. It was not enough, but since I had that Advance I thought I would be foolish not to try it.

Thinking I would set up my own production company, I discovered I would have even more problems taking care of everyone's Social Security and all the rest, and anyway I didn't have 10 per cent of the total capital necessary to give to the government to set up a company. Finally, Filmoblic allowed me to use their corporate structure as a shelter, with Hubert Niogret acting as producer of record. They will also help me sell the film to a distributor.

You can only do so much on credit. People have to be paid. Film and equipment have to be obtained. Still, I did have that Advance of 650,000 francs coming. Did you know there are exactly seventeen steps you must take between the Office de la Création, the Centre National de Cinématographie and the Ministry of Culture, in order to free the funds of an Advance? This requires a lot of time and endless papers, especially since there always seems to be a paper missing, or else the only person who can sign it is on holiday. All this while the film is continuing. Asking people to defer their salaries doesn't exactly inspire confidence on the set. Credit dries up, particularly when you mention the Advance, because everyone knows how slow the government is to pay. In my case, it was the seventh week of an eight week schedule...

How can you make a film when you're spending most of your time playing hide-and-seek with bankers and creditors, or dealing with bureaucrats who only have contempt for you and what you are trying to do? And all this for a film which one will have to fight for once again in order to get it released in some tiny room off the Champs-Élysées where it will be projected out of focus and run a week. The Advance on Receipts is a wonderful idea but... My film is neither expensive nor complicated. The story—about a writer who had one successful book and who is suffering from a writer's block which extends to his personal life—requires few characters and a minimum number of sets. Think what it must be like for someone who wants to make something a bit more elaborate than a 'little' film!

Claude Miller

Claude Miller began his career classically: courses at I.D.H.E.C.; military service in the cinema section of the army; assistant to directors as varied as Bresson, Demy, Allio, Godard and Truffaut, as well as working in television and making advertising films and shorts on his own. In 1976 his first feature, *La Meilleure Façon de Marcher*, met with both critical and commercial success. His second, *Dites-lui que je l'aime*, on the other hand,

received mixed reviews and, while it did respectable business, did not recover its investment. Miller himself terms it a 'financial failure'. When interviewed, Miller was hard at work on a new scenario, *Java*, which he describes as being 'set in the décor of a *fin de siècle* farce—a resort hotel—with all the usual characters one finds in a farce. However, I don't exactly have farce in mind. The character who is exposed with his pants down is funny to an audience, but the situation isn't funny to him. It could even be tragic. That's what I'm after. I have to set it up, but I'm waiting for Luc Béraud to finish cutting his own film to collaborate with me on it. We work best together.'

The other day, Luc Béraud told me that you acted on one another like mutual psychoanalysts...

CLAUDE MILLER: That's probably a good way of putting it. We complement each other. He is very theoretical about *mise en scène*; I am much more empirical. Luc is very much influenced by the cinema, whereas I don't know who shot what in what year and so on. Luc also loves the actual shooting of the film. For him the framing and lighting and so on are tremendously important and exciting. For me it is the scenario. The entire level of social class commentary in *Meilleure Façon* came during the actual shooting, and that aspect is very much Luc's contribution. In most films it is the 'lower' classes which get our sympathy. In *Meilleure Façon* that is inverted. Luc is very interested in the way money works, and in the way personal relationships are like political relationships only on a smaller scale.

You have just acted in Béraud's film. Are you planning to follow Truffaut? To become an actor as well?

No! There are a lot of friends in Luc's film, a lot of directors, like Eustache, Sandy Whitelaw, Edgardo Cozarinsky... It was done out of friendship, for pleasure and for economic reasons. Luc had very little money.

Dites-lui que je l'aime was a failure at the box-office. It seemed to me that it had everything going for it. Have you any idea why it was not a hit?

I have a lot of ideas, but I'm not sure which, if any, explain it. People seemed either to like the film very much or to hate it. Those who went to see it, that is. I think one problem is that people found the characters unpleasant, but they were asked to sympathise with them. The film has its faults, although I'm not going to list them for you, particularly since I'm not sure the faults are the reasons for its failure. The publicity was mistaken, from the poster on through the rest of the campaign. We had also hoped that the 'stars' would draw, but that was clearly an error, since from the first day in the cinemas the film did not draw. Depardieu is a very fine actor, but people won't come to see him. In any case, the French cinema has never had more than about five stars at any one time whose presence guaranteed that people would buy tickets. Currently, for better or worse, there are Delon, Belmondo, Montand, De Funès, and sometimes Girardot. *Dites-lui* was expensive. It cost ten times as much as *Meilleure Façon*. There were elaborate sets to build, lots of different locations, and when you use stars the cost goes up automatically. Had I been able to make *Dites-lui* with the same budget as *Meilleure Façon*—which was impossible—it would have made money.

In your view, what is happening now in French cinema? There is a crisis, yet there are good directors working...

There are fine new directors, and fine directors who are not so new. Maurice Pialat is a great director; his *La Gueule Ouverte* is one of the great films of the French cinema. Maurice Dugowson is a wonderful director. Yet neither of them finds it easy to make films. The crisis takes many forms, but its results are the same: often insurmountable economic obstacles which render it almost impossible to make personal films. People don't go to the cinema much any more in France. It's too expensive. Certainly they don't go to see films; they go to 'events'—*Jaws*, *Star Wars*, and so on. And television has corrupted the viewers. It has encouraged a tendency which was always there: to want to see only very easy things, spectacular things. If Godard were making in 1978 the same films he made

'La Tortue sur le Dos': Jean-François Stévenin, Claude Miller, Bernadette Lafont



during the New Wave era, no one would come to see them. Then, too, cinema is taxed on every level. Did you know that unexposed film is taxed at exactly the same rate in France as caviare? Evidently both are seen as luxuries.

There was television money in the production of *Dites-lui*, wasn't there?

Yes, from the third channel. It is only justice, after all, that television should help produce films for the cinema since it is television which is drawing audiences away from it, and because television in France gets so much government money. There may be legislation soon which would oblige them to do even more, and to limit further the number of films they can show. *Dites-lui* was produced in the traditional way. After *Meilleure Façon* was a hit, it became easier to get money.

There is a certain irony in all this. With *Meilleure Façon* we were like thieves when we started. The budget was 1,500,000 francs. We had been promised 350,000 francs as an Advance on Receipts, but we didn't see a penny of that until after the film was finished. We started with 150,000 francs and the film was made in fits and starts. We borrowed here and there as best we could. Even the costumes were often just pinned together because we couldn't afford to buy clothes which fit the cast. Then we set up screenings of only semi-edited rushes. The money to complete the editing, mixing and the rest came from the distribution deal we set up as a result of those screenings, and new producers came in to pay off the debts. By the time I finished, I owned nothing of the film. It was financially successful, but I have never seen a penny of it. On the basis of the profits gained, however, it was not so difficult to find production money for *Dites-lui*. There were, of course, no profits from that film. I think everyone will get his money back, but no more than that. I am not fooling myself. I know that it will not be easy to get the backing for *Java*. It is a much more personal film than the other two. It is an original script, not an adaptation, and that will make it even more difficult.

I know you still make advertising films to pay your rent. Have you ever thought of making a purely commercial film—like Claude Zidi's vehicle for Belmondo, *L'Animal*?

I don't particularly like to do the advertising films. They are technically well made, but otherwise totally without interest. That is somehow separate for me, however, from the cinema. I couldn't make a film like Zidi's. I could do it technically, but I don't think in those terms and I would never be able to instigate a project like that. Of course one thinks about certain commercial aspects of any film one makes. I wonder sometimes while I'm shooting if the film will please, if it will work. One wants people to see the film. That's why we make films.

Paul Vecchiali

Paul Vecchiali, like many other new French directors, began as a cinéophile—falling in love with cinema, he says, when he saw Anatole Litvak's 1939 *Mayerling* with Danielle Darrieux. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he seems to have found a way to continue making films, even when they are not overwhelmingly successful at the box-office, by circumventing the usual patterns of production and distribution. From his first film in 1961, *Les Petits Drames*, to *Femmes, Femmes* (1974), *Change pas Demain* (1975) and *La Machine* (1977), he has tended to work with many of the same technicians (cameraman Georges Strouve, for example) and actors (Sonia Saviane and Hélène Surgères among others) within the framework of a loosely cooperative repertory company. He has also set up his own production company, Diagonale, to allow himself and other new directors to make the films they want to make.

None of your last three films has done very well at the box-office, and yet . . .

PAUL VECCHIALI: In Paris, no. I think 4,000 people saw *Femmes, Femmes* here. More saw *La Machine*, but not too many. In the provinces, however, both films have done well. Part of the problem is distribution. *Femmes, Femmes* would have done much better had it been shown in more than just one small cinema. Then the distributor for *Change pas Demain* decided to cut whole

sections out of it. That was when I decided never again to let someone else distribute anything I produced or directed. None of the films I have made cost very much. *Femmes, Femmes* was unbelievably cheap: 185,000 francs. *La Machine* was somewhat more expensive at 800,000 francs. So they don't have to make a fortune to get back the investment. Currently I am trying to set up a distribution network for films which cannot survive with the Big Three. There is an audience out there for 'small' or 'difficult' films, and I plan to produce and distribute for that audience. I am particularly interested in producing first films by new directors, since a first film is always the most difficult one to get started on its way.

You have just produced *Le Théâtre des Matières* by a former critic, Jean-Claude Biette, who used many of your people: Saviane and Surgères, for example.

They are 'my' people only in so far as we work together a good deal and I admire their work. We are a group only in that we are trying to develop together the possibilities of a certain cinema. I am not against commercial forms in the cinema. I love most of all the films of the 30s and 40s. I do think, however, that you can work with those forms in ways other than the usual ones. I am planning a musical at present, and I have Darrieux in mind for the lead role. That can hardly be called 'marginal' cinema, although I have in mind a new way of treating a musical.

You can't be said to work in any genre, exactly. *Femmes, Femmes* investigated the mind and style of an actress in a style typical of the 30s. *Change pas Demain* was a pornographic parody of the detective story. *La Machine* was a fictional documentary concerning a child murder and capital punishment. The only thing they seem to have in common is your use of sudden shifts in tone to move the narrative to another level. *La Machine* was even mostly improvised, wasn't it?

Four of us worked on the basic structure of the film. Then Jean-Christian Bouvet, who played the murderer, wrote his character's 'autobiography' and even chose his own crime. Then we all worked from that. Improvisation can lead to very real things that can't be scripted. If they don't work, we can go back and write and try again. What is finally on the screen is a combination of things. *Change pas Demain* certainly was pornographic, although the distributor cut out sections in the hope of avoiding the extra taxes on 'X' films. I like pornography, and think fine things can be done with it. Pornography is still alive.

In spite of the problems of distribution and exhibition, do you find anything important happening in French films?

There are at least forty important directors now working, from Bresson to Demy, with Resnais, Gérard Blain, Biette, Straub, Rivette, Varda and Duras in between . . . I think that in seven or eight years the cinema in France may be different because of what these people are doing. Everyone speaks of the significance of the New Wave directors, and it's true that they made fine films. But they didn't change the French cinema at its base: the structure, the way films are made and distributed, is exactly the same now as it was then. ■

Paul Vecchiali



LAS AMAZONAS

DE CINE

Steven Kovács



Staff of the Venezuelan film office: director Marianella Saletta de Frescot seated; Silvia Allegret at far left.

They are known in Latin American film circles as 'las Amazonas de cine', but neither their looks nor their manner suggest the masculine or the aggressive. Their candid energy is moderated by the quiet elegance of cosmopolitan upper bourgeois Latinas. Yet these three women deserve the warlike epithet, for they have fought fiercely to create a national film industry in Venezuela. More remarkable is that they have succeeded. In a country which could boast a handful of documentaries each year and an occasional feature, last year twenty-one full-length dramatic movies were produced, largely because of their efforts.

Their story and the sudden bloom of Venezuelan film began in 1971, when Marianella Saletta de Frescot, 23-year-old Georgetown graduate in international business, came to work for the National Tourism Bureau. One of her first charges was an Italian film crew in Caracas for a co-production. As she guided them around the country, her curiosity about film was aroused. She began to read about how movies are made, financed, marketed and protected. She contacted those few directors and technicians who had so far supplied the local market with publicity and documentary films, representatives of international distribution companies who provided the feature films, the local theatre owners who played the movies and foreign production chiefs like Rodolfo Echeverría, Mexican movie boss, who understood the intricacies of national protection and international marketing. Gradually Marianella began to formulate her own ideas about the possibilities of film production in Venezuela. Although her

knowledge of motion pictures was expanding rapidly, her ability to act on it was not. She still had a solitary desk on one of the floors of the Tourism Bureau and authority over no one's time but her own.

All along Marianella had been contacting government officials as well as film people. At first, resistance was great. Why should the country produce its own films? Why should the state support what one minister called 'a frivolous art'? But her perseverance and reasoned persuasiveness won the backing of certain key officials. In 1973 the government issued a resolution of support for national cinema. It had been pushed by the Minister of Economic Development, José Ignacio Casal, converted after a four-hour talk with Marianella, a confrontation she still recalls with a sigh of disbelief. With such a powerful ally the wheels began to turn. The following year one million bolívares (c. \$220,000) was budgeted for the office, sufficient to begin preparations for state subsidy of movies.

By then the triumvirate was complete.



'Trampa Inocente', a recent Venezuelan film directed by Oziel Rodriguez

Maria Isabel Loperena, 30-year-old assistant to the director of the Tourism Bureau, was shifted into the film office to head the international division. The daughter of refugees from Franco's Spain, she was born and brought up in Caracas and went to college in the U.S. where she was one of the founders of the *Old Mole*, the short-lived radical sheet that came out of Cambridge (Massachusetts) at the height of the anti-war movement. She covered the Beatles, wrote on women's issues, and drew cartoons. Then came a year in Belgium, where she supported herself as a governess while translating a favourite author from French to English. She had been away from her native land for 13 years and so in 1972 she returned to stay.

Rounding out the team was Silvia Allegret, 23-year-old graduate of the Andrés Bello Catholic University. She had studied sociology and communications, but had had virtually no working experience when she was appointed vice-director of film activities in October 1974. By the time she arrived the initial grant had allowed the setting up of a small office, staffed by eight people.

The fortuitous gathering of these three talented women was necessary for the toughest work that still lay ahead—developing a government policy for the creation and protection of a national film industry and convincing officials, indeed the nation, to underwrite such a programme. Venezuela, like most Third World countries, was at the mercy of foreign distributors, especially Americans, who controlled the total influx of films into the country. Its traffic of movies had never been regulated. Distributors simply had to pay duty on the amount of film to pass through customs, 260 bolivars (c. \$60) per kilo! Protecting their interests, the foreign distribution companies formed a unified bloc which could dictate terms and prices to local exhibitors. In countries with native film industries such as Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the state had achieved varying degrees of control over the distribution of foreign movies. But in Venezuela, where there was no indigenous product, the enactment of protective laws

would have been considered surreal.

Like assiduous students, rather than the state employees they were, the three women began gathering the pertinent data. What were the names of the films that were imported? What financial arrangements existed between distributors and theatre owners? What were the profits for each film, per week, per theatre? Tables, charts, lists were drawn up and analysed. They received some of this information from the distribution companies, some through their own sometimes ingenious resources. Their approach to the foreign companies was reasonable and firm: we are an agency of the government which has the task of formulating policy for the regulation of trade in motion pictures—for our mutual benefit we need your help. Especially in the beginning they were dismissed, not only because nothing like this had been tried before, but because they were attractive, young and female. Yet through their investigations they had amassed so much information about the practices of the trade and had won such support from a number of influential officials that neither their competence nor their authority could be discounted.

When they had learned the nature of the business, they swung into action. In order to help develop the infrastructure of film production, they required a minimum percentage of all prints to be developed in national laboratories and to have that minimum augment year by year. They proclaimed that every theatre had to show at least two Venezuelan features in 1975, to be increased to 30 per cent of all movies in 1976. While these measures were not popular with foreign distribution companies, they did not seriously threaten their interests. What did was their move to set a ceiling on the percentage of box-office grosses demanded by the distributors.

The reaction from the companies was immediate. The Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA), Hollywood's international film cartel, sent its vice-president in charge of Latin American operations to Caracas to organise all distributors against this move; but despite the united stand by the

companies, the proposal was enacted. The Yankee enforcer flew back for a top level meeting with the Minister of Economic Development, threatening to withdraw all American movies from the country if the measure were not revoked. For a country whose most important source of entertainment is Hollywood, such a boycott could have led to popular unrest. What's more, there was a similar boycott in effect against Iran for failing to raise admission prices to a level acceptable to the MPEA. The Minister would not back down. That night he met with Marianella, Silvia and Maria Isabel. Together they drew up an edict instituting export licences for all films which were to leave the country. By refusing to grant such permits to films already in Venezuela, they could keep a steady fare of movies playing in theatres for months to come and thus take the teeth out of the American threat. Anger is merely a bargaining posture in the market place, and soon a friendly relationship was restored between the American representative and the three women. He later confided to them that never before in his many years of troubleshooting in Latin America had he encountered successful unconditional resistance to demands of the MPEA.

Of all the decrees brought about by the film office, none was more important than the one which authorised them to subsidise national films. The resolution was given some meaning in March 1975 when the office received five million bolivars (c. \$1,100,000) from the national budget. They realised that they could not give the money away as grants to film-makers if they wanted to continue to subsidise motion pictures in future years, so they began to operate as a state-owned company. They invited film-makers to submit scripts, shooting plans and budgets of features they proposed to make. They personally evaluated the proposals and selected the ten most promising ventures. The office entered into co-production agreements with the film-makers, advancing up to 60 per cent of the projected cost. That was sufficient to pay the undeferrable expenses of the film. Raising the rest was left to the film-maker.

Once the movie was in production, the film office followed the progress of the shooting. When the arrest of an actor for possession of marijuana threatened to delay completion of a film, Marianella quickly intervened and sprang him from jail, arguing that his detention cost the state so much per day of arrest. With the release of the film, profits were shared equally by the film-maker and film office until the amount of the investment was recovered, after which the film-maker received the remaining profits. Since the films proved instant hits, investments were rapidly returned to the film office. So delighted were the finance ministers that in May 1976 they added another five million bolivars to the budget, making it possible for 21 full-length feature films to be produced in Venezuela in one year.

The launching of the Venezuelan film industry was clearly pioneered by these three women, but it could not have become a reality if political and economic conditions had not been ripe for it. The real boost to their efforts came when the elections of 1974 brought to power the *Acción Democrática*, which aimed to develop a more independent national economy. Although since then the

activities of the film office have several times come under attack, usually because of conservative objection to the radical content of some features. President Perez has repeatedly guaranteed the freedom of film-makers and backed the work of the women. The political support in turn could lead to material assistance since the country began to enjoy the greatest economic boom in its history, with oil prices soaring to nearly \$12 per barrel. At an output of 2.2 million barrels a day, the state receives nearly \$10 billion a year in revenue. Thus, the amount invested in film is literally a drop in a vast bucket or, to be exact, the revenue collected on the oil pumped out in 2 hours and 15 minutes.

Yet what is a paltry sum to the nation is crucial to its film industry. Today nearly 6,000 people work in activities related to film. The staff of the film office has grown to 25 people, 20 of them women. It has become a clearing house for film. Besides regulating distribution and exhibition, it is an office of information and a meeting place for actors, directors and technicians. But most important, it has made an indelible contribution to national cultural life whose value cannot be measured in gross receipts or people employed.

For what has happened in the movie theatres is as unusual as what happened in the planning office. Too often native movies have a bad reputation at home. Not only are they usually crudely made, but they lack the glamour and sophistication of the French, Italian or American product. Such is the antipathy towards them that even the best films are received with suspicion. But not in Venezuela, where in 1976 native movies accounted for only 2 per cent of the total number shown, but 4 per cent of the gross profits. Venezuelans are excited by seeing movies featuring their best known actors in local settings, recreating turning points of their national past or confronting contemporary problems. In short, they are moved by visions of their national culture.

Needless to say, not all these movies are of a high quality. The odds are that they would not be even if seasoned professionals were to

make them. And they are the creations of men and women who have had experience mostly in commercials and shorts. Sometimes the camerawork is routine, the dialogue awkward, the story lacking in balance or compelling force. But such shortcomings are to be expected from a country without a cinematic tradition. They can be overcome only with more experience and greater self-assurance on the part of the film crews. Despite the flaws, these films have a freshness to which audiences respond. Already promising are fine performances by actors who come from the stage, occasionally sensitive recreations of historical periods, and the rare instances of innate directorial talent. Most encouraging is the boldness of the themes. *Chronicle of a Latin American Subversive* is a Venezuelan *State of Siege*; *Fever* is the recreation of the political uprising of 1938; *Compañero Augusto* depicts the rehabilitation of an ex-guerrilla to a bourgeois life style; *Tame Song for a Grave People* and *I am a Delinquent* are stories of delinquency in the capital city.

The spectacular success of the three women is possibly unrivalled in the history of cinema. But perhaps more important, their *modus operandi* offers an instructive example to those who wish to decolonise culture in the Third World. In Venezuela for years radical documentarists tried to win state support for native film production. They failed because they posed too much of a threat to the authorities and because they worked from the outside. Like radicals elsewhere, they wanted revolutionary change within a traditional structure. Since the government had resisted similar leftist proposals in other sectors of the economy, there was no reason to yield to a small group of film-makers.

Unlike them, the three women worked from the inside. They did not identify themselves politically, so that they were never suspected of being subversives and easily survived the transition of power from one party to the other. They presented their case for a Venezuelan cinema in nationalist, not Marxist terms. Working within the state

apparatus, they learned the ways in which they could effect change. They found the officials who were most sympathetic to their cause as well as the best channels for realising their goals. Ironically, even their inexperience with film worked to their advantage. First, their ideas about the film industry were shaped by data, not by ideology. Second, they were not regarded as a threat to the existing order because they were not identified with an outside pressure group. As a result they succeeded where so many others had failed. Marianella attributes their achievement partly to their ability as women to be more diplomatic than men in reconciling the diametrically opposite stands chosen by the radicals and merchants of the film world. Today they have won the gratitude and open support of the older male radical film-makers' contingent as well as of Venezuelan officialdom and the nation.

If the women succeeded so well, it was in large part because they worked so well together. Every major decision was regularly discussed by all of them, the pros and cons weighed one by one and measured against each other. When they arrived at what appeared to be their final position, one of them would muster all her persuasiveness to argue against it, and only when her arguments were effectively refuted would the position be adopted. Their interaction is exemplary even in a mutual interview. They yield to each other naturally, yet never try to reach a consensus if they truly disagree. A high respect for each other's professional abilities emanates from all of them.

Is their position as young executives unusual among women in Venezuela? They don't think so. Because of the recent economic boom, there has been a great need for professionals. And because 60 per cent of the population is under 21 many of the executives are also young. At least in the government women have held key positions. One woman is governor of a state; two have been ministers in the previous administration. It is doubtful, however, that lower class women have equal working possibilities in a country which is part of the macho continent.

Because of their belief in abundant opportunities for professional women, the trio do not see the need for a feminist movement in Venezuela and are perplexed by its strong manifestation in the U.S. They are genuinely shocked by the lack of professional opportunities they hear about in the States, especially because their acquaintance with America dates from college, when they observed men and women in identical roles as students. Furthermore, consistent with their middle-class upbringing, they are mildly put off by the more militant elements of American feminism. They still define themselves in traditional female roles.

Ultimately, their highest goal is the development of a national culture in the cinema. Venezuelans used to know more about the sexual style of the French, the humour of the Italians and the American way of life than they did about themselves. Now that is changing. Movies can create a consciousness of national problems and values in stories developed, acted and shot by Venezuelans. Perhaps the greatest professional reward the women have claimed has been the repeated popular success of such movies. For that they are proud to be called Amazons.

'Simplício', directed by Franco Rubartelli



THE MAN IN THE CRYOGENIC FREEZER



'Dark Star'

Tom Milne and Richard Combs

After the 1960s, when younger American film-makers seemed to be turning increasingly to Europe for inspiration, have come the nostalgic 70s and a return to the old Hollywood. It can be no accident that three of the decade's most commercially successful movies—*The Godfather*, *Jaws* and *Star Wars*—were not only genre pieces (albeit elephantised), but made by directors who had already established themselves more or less in critical esteem.

Like George Lucas, John Carpenter (born Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1948) is a graduate of the University of Southern California cinema department who has made the grade after a debut in science fiction. Unlike Lucas, Carpenter seems less concerned with updating the old Hollywood ways than with trying to prove that nothing in his best of all possible worlds need ever have changed; and the difference between their respective first features, *THX 1138* and *Dark Star*, is very marked, notably by a rather strained quest for significance on the part of Lucas, and a steely determination in Carpenter to have no truck with messages.

First seen in Britain at the Edinburgh Festival in 1974 and screened last Christmas on television, *Dark Star* began as a forty-five minute student project while Carpenter was still at USC, and was then turned into a feature costing \$60,000 when several people became interested. Not exactly a parody of 2001, the film nevertheless turns Kubrick's clock back a good many years: 'I've loved science fiction since I was a kid,' Carpenter says, 'and some of the film was paying tribute to the old science fiction films . . . the beach ball alien was like the 50s rubber monsters running around. We had no money to compete with 2001, but its religious overtones insulted me so much that I just said I'm not going to do that, I'm going to make a down

to earth movie, how do you clean your underwear when you're on a spaceship and so on.'

Almost all done by animation camera and cartoons, the special effects in *Dark Star* actually look extremely elaborate and expensive, and true to his promise, Carpenter puts the skids under the one moment when mystical overtones threaten as the spaceship runs into trouble and the acting captain, as a last resort, goes to consult the dead captain preserved in a 'cryogenic freezer compartment'. Appealed to for advice, the oracle first complains that no one has visited in ages, then lapses into silence, sleepily trying to collect its wits before anticlimactically muttering, 'Well, if you can't get it to stop,

talk to the bomb, teach it phenomenology.'

Characteristically, Carpenter then turns anticlimax into climax. Absurdly the acting captain approaches the recalcitrant bomb—primed by a malfunction, it has resisted blandishments from the computer (no HAL but a sexy siren) to un-prime itself—and engages it in philosophical debate, the astronaut arguing that objects are merely ideas while the bomb stoutly insists, 'I think, therefore I exist.' Interested, the bomb finally withdraws to think it over, re-emerging for a moment of strange and haunting epiphany worthy of Ray Bradbury. Now converted to the idealistic position, the bomb is back with Genesis: 'I saw that there was darkness and I was alone. . . Let there be light!' And a blinding white flash obliterates the screen as the bomb creates its world and in empty space the two surviving astronauts float alone with their obsessions.

Wonderfully funny, *Dark Star* is flawed only by a slight self-indulgence in certain scenes where the original concept clearly (though delightfully) shows signs of having been padded out. This was a mistake Carpenter was not to repeat in his next feature, *Assault on Precinct 13* (cost, \$200,000). A thriller which transposes the basic situation of *Rio Bravo* (a police station manned by a skeleton staff and some unlikely allies is attacked kamikaze-style by a vengeful youth gang), its relaxed, assured economy of style, reminiscent of the best of 40s film noir, had the audience at the London Film Festival

last December unabashedly cheering and applauding like 14-year-old film fans.

Carpenter manages to send his action up and take it absolutely seriously at the same time, keeping his audience simultaneously on the edge of their seats and on the brink of gleeful mockery. The film is a virtuoso display of old-style professionalism, shot with beautiful functionalism in the head-on camera style that marked nearly all the Hollywood greats from Ford and Hawks to Billy Wilder, who might have been talking for John Carpenter when he condemned any director who does otherwise with his camera. 'He isn't doing what he should be doing: telling the story.'

JOHN CARPENTER: Exactly. I believe in that so much. Because when you use the camera to express an emotion by an exaggerated angle or something, that is fine, but if you have to do it because what is happening on the screen is not interesting or compelling enough, then you're in trouble. If people are talking, that's more important than the director saying hey, look at me, I'm a director, I can do all this. Who cares about that anyway? The audience cares about what is on the screen. Film school allowed me to grab the camera and zoom in and out and show off. I hate show-offs and I hate pretension. My first films were very avant-garde because, as young as I was, you don't know what the hell you're doing, so I tried everything and kind of felt my way along. I made some awful movies. I couldn't show them, they're just so horrible.

Sometimes of course you have to have an angle or a camera trick for a dramatic effect, and then, if it's used right, you hope it works and the audience will respond to it emotionally. For instance, I shot the opening of *Assault on Precinct 13* myself, using a hand-held camera, following the gang coming out of a doorway and walking down an alley, then they hear something but go on and are suddenly gunned down, and you look up and see the police ambush above. I knew that it would be a bit self-conscious but that people would pay attention to it right away, and then I could get on with the film and move them into it.

Do you really see yourself as belonging with the older generation of film-makers, people like Howard Hawks?

Absolutely, yes. If I had three wishes, one of them would be 'Send me back to the 40s and the studio system and let me direct movies.' Because I would have been happiest there. I feel I am a little bit out of time. I have much more of a kinship for older style films, and very few films that are made now interest me at all. I get up and walk out on them. And in that sense I have a tough battle.

I like genres, and regardless of what film I do, I identify for myself what genre I'm working in, so that I can relate it to others. Not necessarily that I want to say to the audience hey, you've seen this before, but for myself I identify it. And I find that I make films differently, and my ideas are basically different from most directors in Hollywood because—and I may be wrong—films are getting more and more pretentious. Even something like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*... It's a movie about flying saucers, and the potential of a big budget movie about flying saucers could be great, but the way the

film was made they just... went out the window!

How do you feel about the New Wave then, Godard and Truffaut and their early attempts to extend the genres?

It's very difficult for me to reflect on that. I have a feeling that Truffaut and Godard, a lot of European film-makers... whether it's the system they are working under or... their movies are texturally inferior somehow, there's something missing in them, just in terms of a visceral approach to a movie. And I can't figure out whether it's intentional, or whether they haven't the technicians, or what. But there is a distance from the screen to the audience. And my whole philosophy of movies is that movies are not intellectual, they are not ideas, that is done in literature and all sorts of other forms. Movies are *emotional*, an audience should cry or laugh or get scared. I think the audience should project into the film, into a character, into a situation, and *react*. The great thing about some of the B movies or the *film noir*, say, is that the audience did just that. In *The Big Sleep* they wanted to know what Humphrey Bogart was going to do. These other directors don't do that. They take the superficial aspects of it but they don't get down to the real guts of the thing, which is that the audience has to care. I don't feel you can just sit and analyse the film intellectually, because then it has failed. So in terms of extending the genres, philosophical ideas, I'm not as interested in that as I am in getting the audience to react, really to project into the film, and come away having had an experience.

At the same time you are also in a sense distancing the audience, alerting them to be aware of what they are seeing in genre terms, through your humour and your movie allusions.

Because I think audiences are more sophisticated now and they've seen too many genre films. I'm trying to get them in all sorts of directions, but it's not an intellectual idea. They don't sit and think, 'What's he trying to say?' They'll laugh or chuckle their way with me, or they'll *feel* their way.

You said that the humour in *Dark Star* was a later development. Is the same true of *Assault on Precinct 13*?

Exactly. I found in both films that I had constructed a situation which, the grimmer it got, the funnier it was to me. In *Dark Star*, these men have been in space for twenty years, there are no women, and they are kind of going crazy. I put myself in that situation and said it's horrible, then I began to think it was funny. The same goes for *Assault on Precinct 13*. I began with a very serious idea about people being attacked which began to become humorous to me. So it arises out of the situation rather than the decision, well, I'm going to make this funny. The first part of the picture, setting up the characters and the conflict, before they all arrive at the police station, is fairly straight, because I've learned that you want to take an audience up to a certain point and set them up, let them know what's going to happen. Then I begin dropping in the humour, like the girl wailing, 'Why would anybody shoot at a police station?'. From then on I can carry the absurdity. So basically, as soon as the lights go out in the station and the siege begins, I figured I had a chance to start putting some

humour in, because the audience by that point is hooked.

The humour is also backed by another sense of slight dislocation that comes with the introduction of Napoleon Wilson, the killer on his way to Death Row who becomes a hero and seems to belong to another film.

Or maybe another time. Out of the Old West, I hope. I try to make him so that he doesn't really belong with the people around him. He's completely out of place as a prisoner. He is, in a way, removed in a heroic sense from everyone else, and I try to define his character less in terms of him being psychologically strange than through his lines, through the sort of metaphysical level on which he judges people. He is always asking people for a smoke, for instance, and there are two people who respond to him with some sort of kindness. One is the black police lieutenant, who says 'No... sorry', and Wilson thinks, ah, he gave me a little respect as a human being. The other is the girl, she gives him a cigarette. So through his eyes those are the two people who are worthy of his respect. At the end, after what they have been through, Wilson and the lieutenant have established a sort of bond; I could have built up their characters and the relationship, but I thought that would have been copying Hawks right down the line, so I just didn't want to do it. Basically it's Wilson's ending, and all I wanted was, through the lieutenant, to state the fact that he deserved some dignity for what he'd done. It wasn't meant to be more... just a very simple ending, clean, heroic.

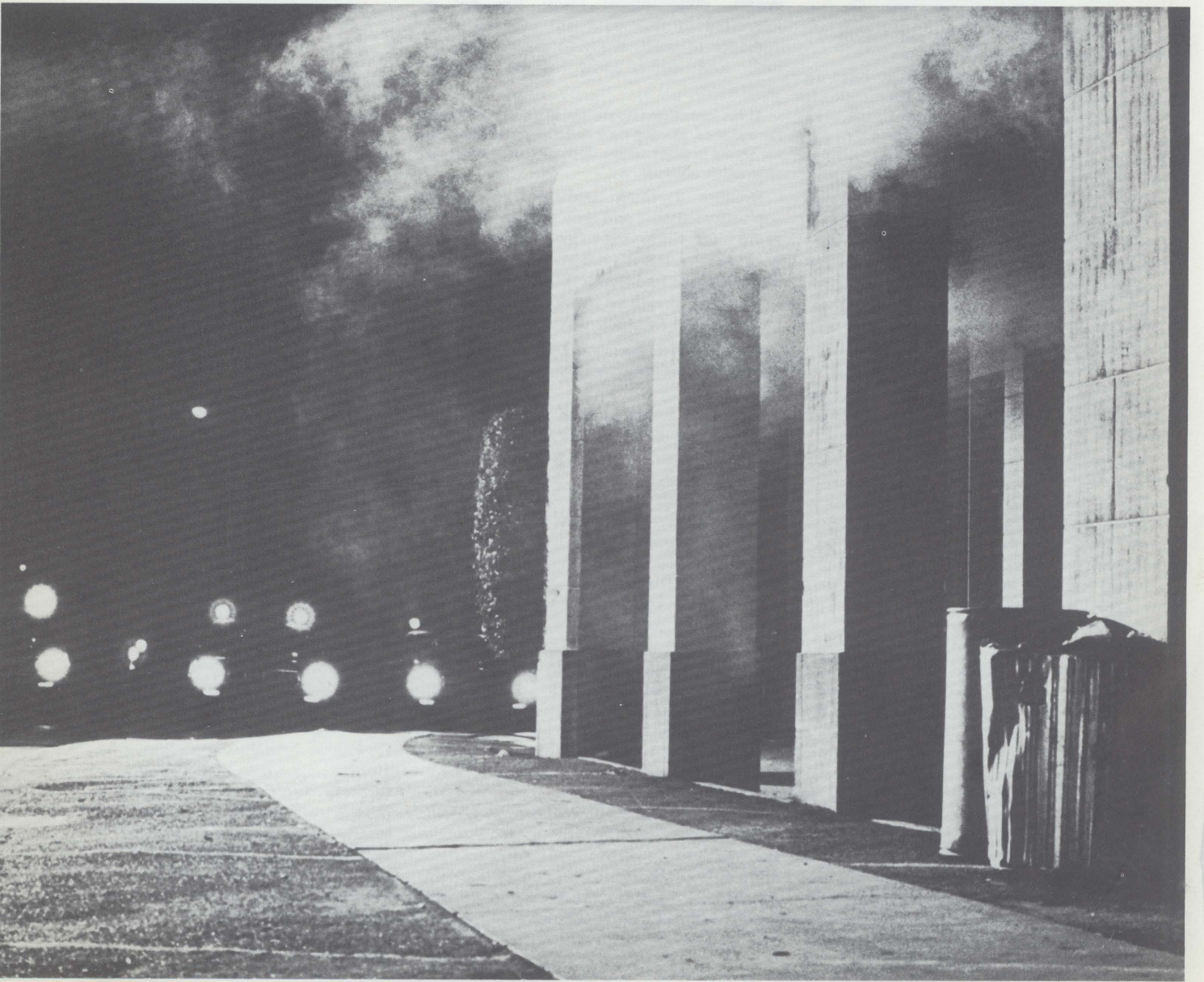
Wilson's dialogue is very Hawksian; isn't some of it quoted from *Rio Bravo*?

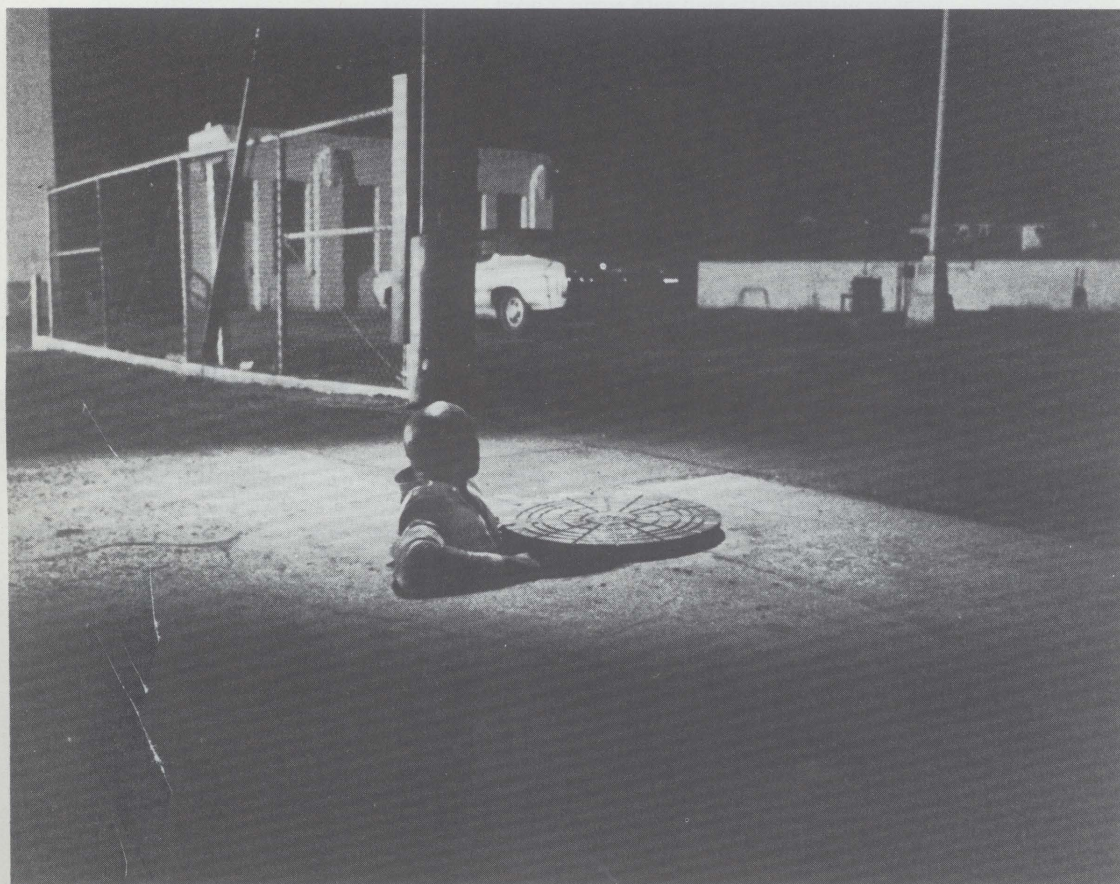
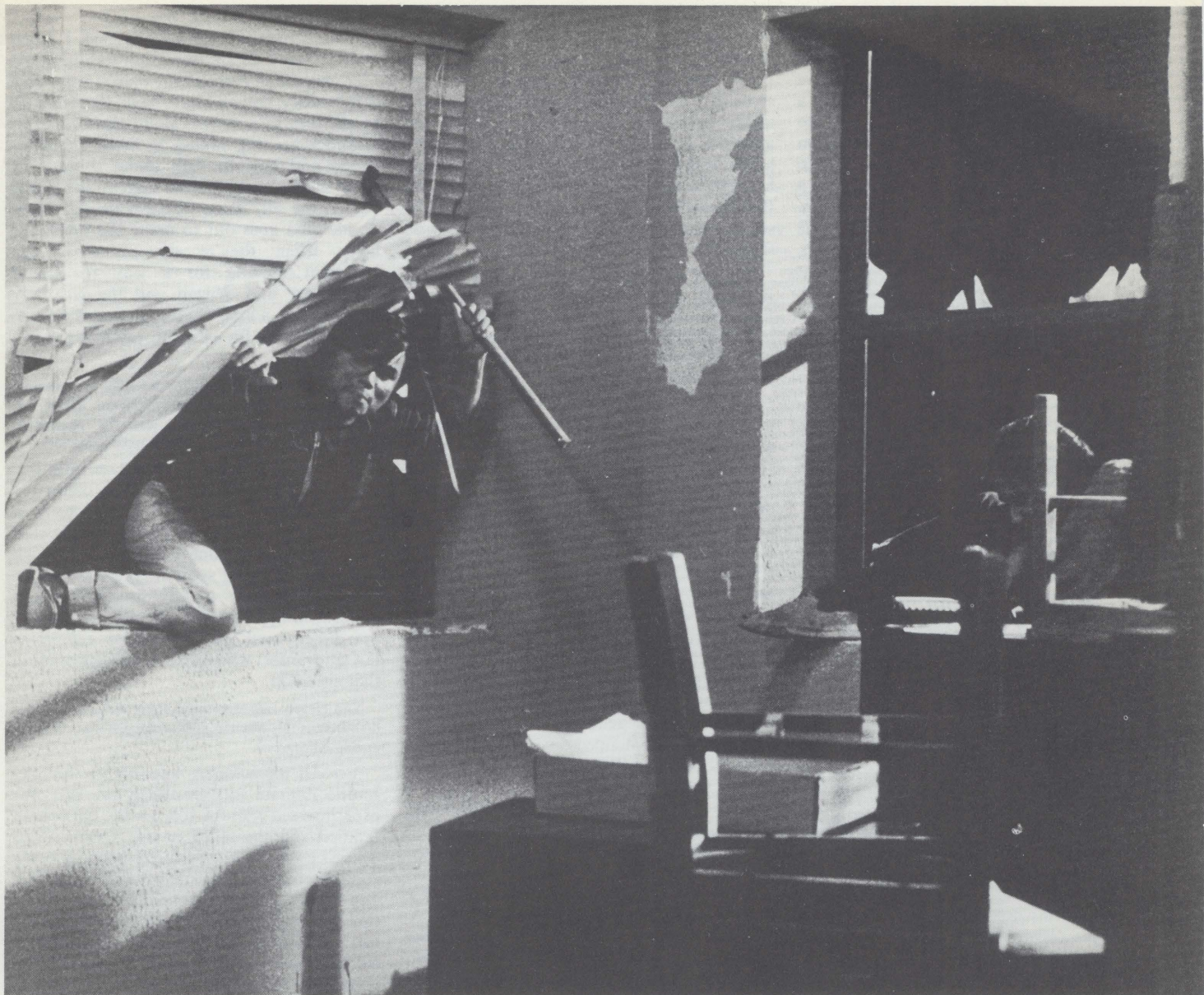
Not to my knowledge. Maybe unconsciously. There's the line when Wilson says to the girl 'You were good!' after her part in the shoot-out, and I thought, wait a minute, I've heard that before, where did that come from? And I think it's from a lot of Hawks films. But I wasn't consciously quoting it, it sort of came out of the character.

Apart from the unmistakable Hawksian feeling, there do seem to be replays from *Rio Bravo*, like the 'No quarter' banner that the Cholo gang throw down before the police station and the 'No quarter' music played throughout the wait for the attack in *Rio Bravo*.

I really never thought of that. The closest thing to another film that I was consciously aware of is the tossing of the shotgun, which is from *Red River*. The police being alerted to what is going on when blood from the dead telephone linesman starts dripping on to the roof of their patrol car... yes, I guess that's the blood in the beer scene in *Rio Bravo*. And nobody seems to have noticed that the black lieutenant's story about being taken to a police station as a child by his father is Hitchcock's own story.

But the tossing of the shotgun is the closest I ever got to taking something and really using it, because I don't like to do that. I find a lot of directors, specifically somebody like De Palma, virtually copy a film as he did with *Vertigo*, and I hate that. Bogdanovich copies too. He wants to make movies about old movies, to say, 'Hey look at me, I have good taste, I love Hawks, I love Ford, I love Hitchcock, isn't that great?' I don't want to copy another film, simply to get the ambience. In the case of *Assault on Precinct 13*, I was approached by a backer with a





ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13

certain amount of money, and he said, let's make a picture that we can sell. And I wanted to make a Western, very badly, because I love Westerns. So I thought, I'm going to make a modern-day Western, and I'm going to transpose the Indians attacking the fort. I'm going to use youth gangs. And I'm going to use archetypal heroes, I'm going to stylise a great deal, I'm a great Howard Hawks fan. And it just sort of came out of that. But the point is that the film has to stand on its own, without the inferences from Hawks. That can't be the central point of it. After all, although I *also* made it for people like you to get an added attraction out of it, I made the film basically for audiences who don't know Hawks from anybody.

Isn't there a slight anomaly in that, although you see yourself back in terms of the Hollywood studio system, you are practically a one-man band, not only directing, scripting and editing, but writing the music and virtually producing your films. So where's the system?

The system back then, as I understand it from having talked with people, is that the control and the style and the point of view was basically left up to the director. Today in Hollywood the mechanics of getting a film going, the number of hands that grab on to it, is ridiculous. When I say studio system, I would have loved to have worked with the stars they had on the roster, the technicians they had, the kind of movies they were doing where a director could move from one genre to another in succession. I would love to give up writing films. I hate writing. I hate editing. I'm doing it only out of self-defence, because there's no one else who can do it to my liking. And the reason I have done the music on my films is because I'm the cheapest and the best I know for the price! I would love to work with a Goldsmith or somebody like that, but I can't afford to, so it's me.

Do you foresee difficulties in surviving now that the studio system doesn't exist any more and so many deals have to be made with people wanting a piece of the pie?

I know, this comes down to my present dilemma, because I don't want to compromise that much and I see the writing on the wall to get to a position of power where I can do my own films my own way. I must compromise to a certain extent, and the least painful way is through writing. So, writing my way towards a position of power, I have to write scripts that I often wouldn't want to direct, and I have become a good journeyman writer. I've written a lot of scripts that are successful but that I wouldn't give a damn about, although I always apply the craft and do a good job. What I'm saying is that I don't put John Carpenter into those scripts—and in the past year I've written six—I write them for the machine and for an end purpose. I want to do *Assault on Precinct 13* with five million dollars and big stars: this is what I'm after, taking a low budget film like this and getting the power to be able to do it within the studios. They're not going to let me walk in, I have to work my way up there. It's very frustrating.

And paradoxical. *Assault on Precinct 13* might reasonably be described as a surefire commercial movie. Yet the major distributors weren't exactly falling over themselves to distribute it in Britain.

Yes, I know. I feel I'm treading on thin ice in a way. The film was distributed all wrong in America, as blood and guts, without any of

the suspense or mystery. And *Assault* doesn't deliver that, so it has done just fair. If I had made this film brutally realistic, without stylising it at all, it probably would have done much better in America. I wanted the audience to have fun with the characters, laugh with them, while at the same time having the violence of the situation going on. But because the youth gang problem is so serious over there, they don't want it to be stylised.

Although you elide the violence so that there is remarkably little of the currently fashionable blood-letting, despite the fantastic number of killings, there is still one fairly shocking moment: when the little girl—conventionally to be menaced but not killed—is shot through the ice-cream.

When I thought of that, to me it was the most absurd death I could think of, getting shot through an ice-cream cone. You don't really see very much when she is shot; it's the idea of it that is kind of horrifying. A simple dramatic trick: I wanted the bad guys to be *bad*. And if they could kill that little girl, there is no way you'll sympathise with them, there is no way you'll say, well, they're poor, they have reasons. I didn't want any political or social messages at all, and that scene was specifically planned for that reason. An incident that really happened started me on it. A youth gang was standing round a bus stop and a bus pulled up. One of them said, the next person that gets off, I'm going to kill him. A little girl stepped out and he shot her, got in a car, and drove away. What kind of people will do that? In broad daylight? I mean, they don't care about *anything*, it's completely senseless and psychotic. So I thought, well, I'll make the villains that way, because to me that's a frightening thing, utter horror, to think I'm going to walk down a street and be shot for nothing.

I was discussing the character with the actor who plays this gang member who shoots the little girl, and he gave me the best explanation of the villain. He said, 'I don't want to play this as a man with a gun, I want to play it as a man who *is* a gun.' That was exactly what I wanted these people to be like, killing machines with the mechanics of the trigger. They just don't care, which is why this character, when he gets out of the car to confront the dead child's father, just stands there and is shot down. Basically, to me the evil outside was totally irrational and senseless. Had I wanted the gang to be realistic, to make a social comment, it probably would have been either an all-Chicano or an all-black gang. I deliberately made it racially mixed, not being too specific about it, keeping it a little shadowy and indistinct.

Talking about B movies, you said that one of their great qualities was in going straight from A to B; but you also said that in *Dark Star* you meander, giving yourself a chance to explore personality. Do you feel the same is true of *Assault on Precinct 13*?

Yes, very definitely. With *Dark Star* we had a stricter narrative at first. Then as the picture grew, I began to realise that there were variations on the basic situation, that I could go off in this direction or that, explore this guy a little bit more and then over to another, and that the audience would go along. It was an episodic kind of thing, the closest I've come to improvisation; but the thing that allowed me to do this was the central concept, without it I'd have been lost. Now I've

become a little bit more disciplined. I don't think I would do anything that loose again.

In *Assault on Precinct 13*, Wilson has a very simple story, and all I have to do is set him up to get him to a certain point. But I like to meander around, taking in Wilson's philosophy and how he feels about things: the scene in the bus where he talks to his police escort; the silly game whereby he and Wells decide who goes out to make the break for help; when they're downstairs in the basement looking for a way to defend themselves, and Wilson and the girl talk, discuss really a kind of love relationship while the movie stops for a minute, just going off on a sidetrack.

Much of Wilson's dialogue has this meandering, teasing quality, with his philosophical asides, his half-completed explanations, and the unresolved question of how he came to be named Napoleon.

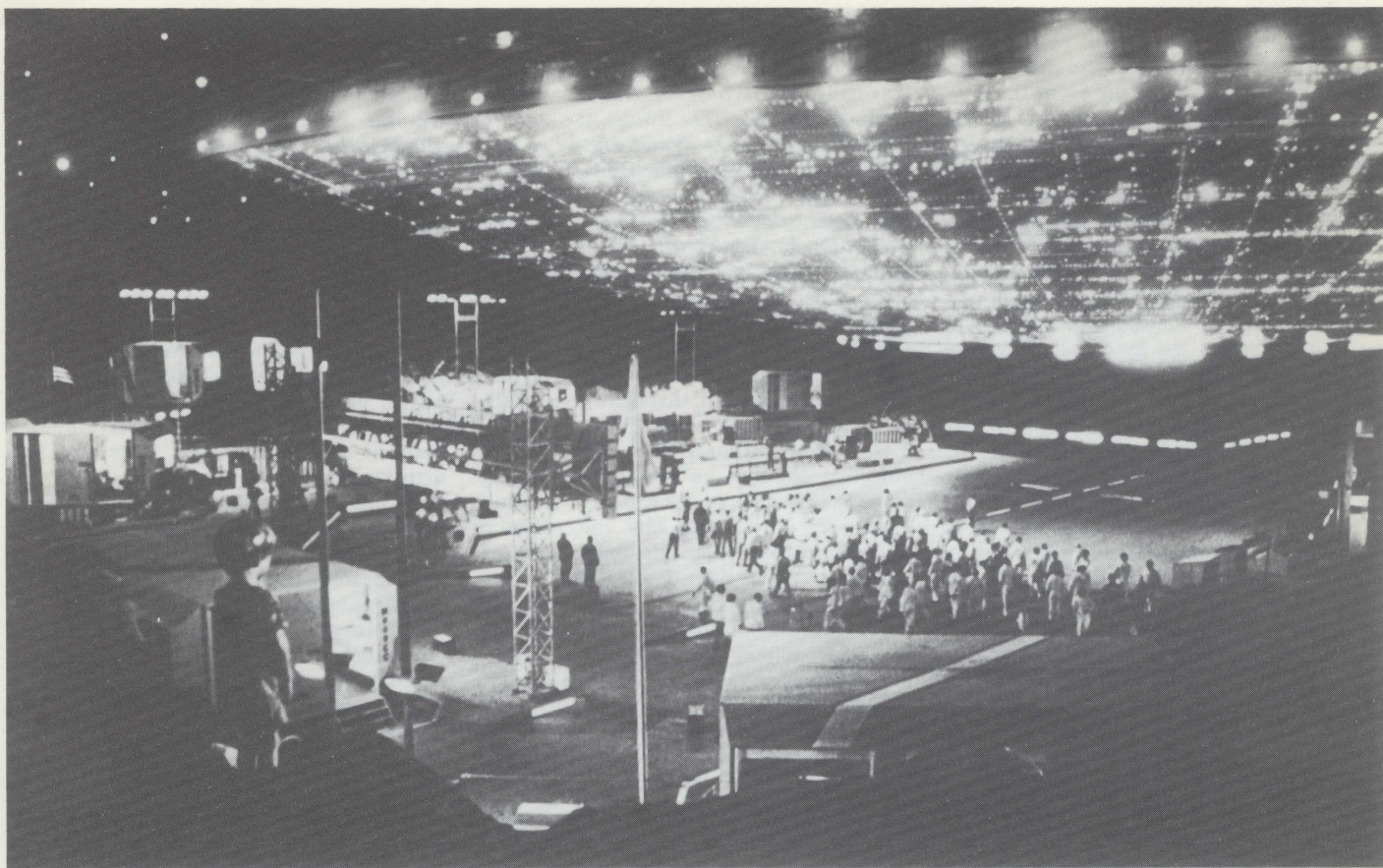
I'm trying to build a certain mystery, curiosity, romance about this man, compared to the police lieutenant, who's really a straitlaced kind of guy whom I wouldn't want to spend a lot of time with. He isn't black because I'm saying something about blacks. Nor did I want to say anything about policemen. I just wanted somebody, a kind of one-dimensional character who represents law and order, who accepts responsibility in that situation.

You clearly calculate everything down to the last detail. Was this why the part of the girl was cut down during editing?

Yes. Of the actresses I tested for the role, Laurie Zimmer was absolutely the best. We experimented with the role a little, but I think I failed and she failed in one specific area. There's a line in this character between being cool and assured and strong, and being cold and bitchy. And she crossed the line several times. It was my fault. She was very nervous, this was her first film. So when I got it into the cutting-rooms, I realised . . . this was a nuance, but it had to do with how you feel about this woman. So I had to cut a great deal of her part out, a lot of good lines which, if they had been delivered correctly, would I think have added to the film, though she works pretty well now. Most of what was cut had to do with her relationship to the other girl, Julie, the one who gets killed, who had a part that made much more sense originally. Now you perhaps wonder why I have her in the film at all, except to get killed. But originally there were tensions between the two girls, with Julie resenting Leigh for various reasons: Leigh is not only more attractive, she is an upper middle class girl who has come down into the ghetto, and being a cop is trying to help people. It gave a little more complexity, a little bit more shading, so that you understand why Julie fell apart before she was killed. You have to be careful of these fine lines: if you dip over, the audience is lost . . .

Can you envisage yourself turning to literary adaptations?

There's a book I very much want to film by Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination*. Terrific science fiction . . . it would cost millions and millions of dollars, I'll never be able to do it. I also, strangely enough, would love to do Edgar Allan Poe's *A Descent into the Maelstrom*. I think it could be a tremendous film. But that's all in the future. I have to establish myself as a writer first, and then explore. ■



'Close Encounters': the spacecraft and the skywatchers

The Middle American Sky

John Pym

Steven Spielberg has told an anecdote (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1977) which bears repetition since it so neatly encapsulates the simple principles which lie behind the marketing of his new film, *Close Encounters*

of the Third Kind. The film's concluding forty minutes were shot in a hangar on a disused Air Force base in Mobile, Alabama; this was sealed off so thoroughly—as thoroughly, indeed, as Spielberg claims the U.S. Government has shrouded its attitude to unidentified flying objects—that a reporter from the *Washington Post*, having failed to inveigle his way in, resorted to late-night conversations in bars with some of the extras. Spielberg dismisses the account that was later printed as 'the most erroneous, far-fetched encounter of the fifth kind that I have ever read.' But, he added, the reporter 'made it sound even more intriguing to the general reader, because, by not knowing what he was talking about, he wrote a very interesting story.'

The artful secrecy which surrounded the making and content of *Close Encounters* caught the attention of other newspaper and magazine writers: almost all of them, for instance, underlined the fact that the hangar set was 'six times larger' than any Hollywood sound stage (Spielberg himself modestly admits it was four times the size of anything at MGM or Cinecittà). The fact that cast and technicians were 'sworn' to secrecy about all aspects of the film fuelled speculation. Add to this that the director was the 'boy wonder' Spielberg (an epithet that persists although he is now thirty), who had made—need readers be reminded—that seamless money-maker *Jaws*, and already, before horse trading had begun between the U.S. circuit managers and Columbia Pictures, largest shareholders in a production that is estimated to have cost some \$19m, one could sense a ground swell of intrigued interest in a movie about which virtually nothing was known.

In April last year, Columbia, in what was announced as 'the most ambitious advertising campaign in the history of the company', laid the ground-work of the film's marketing by placing two-page 'introductory' advertisements in twenty-seven newspapers in cities across the United States. The campaign steadily increased during the following six months before the start of the film's staggered release. Shortly before an opening in a new city there were daily count-down notices in the papers, and movie theatres were blanketed with a long, sophisticated and wholly unrevealing trailer. Unlike *Jaws*, which had been a calculated hit movie from the time the novel was in galleys, the policy towards *Close Encounters* seems to have been to restrict its release until intrigued interest had developed into an urge to see the picture. (The same principles, it may be noted, were behind the delayed release of *Star Wars* in Britain.)



Close Encounters of the Third Kind—its title is sky-watchers' jargon for physical contact between a human and an extra-terrestrial being—turns out in the event to be an exercise in pseudo-scientific hocus-pocus. The film, rather in keeping with its pre-history, spends most of its 135 minutes coaxing the audience into a state of anticipatory excitement by swift cross-cutting between three loosely realised narrative strands each of which promises, though never finally delivers, an adequate explanation for all the flurry. The plot, briefly, concerns an amorphous group of scientists led by Claude Lacombe (François Truffaut) on a secret, world-wide mission tracking unidentified flying objects: having received and decoded a map reference from an unknown spacecraft, the group sets up a makeshift landing strip at the foot of a table-topped mountain in Wyoming. Meanwhile, a blue-collar power worker, Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss), and, separately, a four-year-old boy, Barry Guiler, are inexplicably affected by a night visit from three spacecraft—a close encounter of the second kind—with the result that the latter, despite the best efforts of his mother Gillian (Melinda Dillon), is subsequently subsumed into space, while the former drives his three children and his wife (Teri Garr) out of their home by his mysterious need to build models of ever-increasing size and detail of what later transpires to be the table-topped mountain.

The film opens in a sand storm in the Sonora Desert, Mexico, where Lacombe and his confederates come across six aeroplanes missing since 1945: they are in working order and, while the storm rages, the scientists learn from a dazed old man, witness to some inexplicable phenomenon, that the sun came out and 'sang'. Bemused and intrigued, the spectator himself then witnesses the appearance of a UFO on a radar screen: this by way of introduction to the principal sequence in the first half of the movie, the appearance of a trio of spacecraft over Muncie, Indiana. The craft black out the neighbourhood and have a strange effect on metal objects (toys wind themselves up, screws unscrew, cookers switch themselves on and judder up and down). Blinding lights appear; the police give chase to the craft; stolid Midwesterners gaze into the night sky; and then, as suddenly as they came, the craft—all flashing lights and fancy formation-flying—disappear over the horizon. What, one wonders, will happen now? Spielberg's answer is to initiate an elaborate game of hide-and-seek with the viewer, at one point whisking him off to India for a baffling minute or two in which a crowd of saffron-robed men suddenly point their fingers to heaven, at another engaging in rudimentary domestic fun-and-games at the expense of the Neary household (given an immense bowl of mashed potatoes, the possessed Roy ladles its contents on to his dinner-plate and under the tearful gaze of his family begins fashioning a potato mountain).

A workmanlike professionalism has characterised Spielberg's earlier feature films, but *Close Encounters* is throughout an indulgent *folie de grandeur*. Neglecting firm characterisation or believable human drama in favour of decorative curlicues (the rattling machinery of the special effects department, the lackadaisical *hommage* to Hitchcock in a final crop-dusting/mountain climbing sequence, a gurglingly precious little boy who exits through the cat-flap in his mother's home

to disappear who knows where), the film is marked by a hurrying pace and a tone compounded of awe and breathy excitement. Originally titled *Watch the Skies* (the last line of Howard Hawks' *The Thing*), the script of *Close Encounters* was written and extensively rewritten by Spielberg himself. Its esoteric title was drawn from the book *The UFO Experience, a Scientific Enquiry* by the film's adviser Dr. J. Allen Hynek. Julia Phillips, co-producer with her husband Michael, explained her enthusiasm for the film: 'As Spielberg outlined it, it was even more than a story about UFOs and a government cover-up of the whole UFO matter. I know it is Steven's feeling, and we share it, that there is something up there.'

One feels throughout a little like an unwilling guest at an evangelical meeting: being thumped about the ears (for the film is excessively noisy) with bits and pieces of received 'truth' to which the only response is acceptance or baffled disbelief. Thus, Spielberg would have us believe with the certainty of a von Daniken (another man who has made millions trafficking in 'evidence') that humans are indeed spirited into the heavens, that spaceships do indeed shoot across the middle American sky and that the United States Government has hushed up the matter for fear of the panic which might break out should this intelligence be made public. Judging by *Close Encounters*, however, the evidence is strictly side-show pyrotechnics: the judicious promise to bring the audience 'as close as possible to an event that could be the most momentous of our time.'

So, what finally do we have after the months of anticipation, the elusive press reports, the brochure costing \$1.50 ('for additional copies of this book send \$2.00 to Encounter Enterprises Inc. . .'), the preliminary ninety minutes of running time? The poster shows a highway disappearing into the distance: on the horizon of the night sky is a bright white light. What lies over the horizon? At one point, early on in the film, Spielberg hints that he may not in fact take his subject altogether seriously. Neary's sons are seated before the television watching the DeMille *Ten Commandments*. Mrs. Neary protests 'That picture is four hours long', at which Neary mumbles to himself 'I told them they could watch only five of the Commandments.' It is as if Spielberg was signalling that he did have some sense of critical perspective when it came to dealing with uplifting movies.

The end, however, proves us wrong. Neary and Gillian feel impelled to go to the table-topped mountain; they are taken prisoner by Lacombe's men—why exactly is far from clear—only to escape and then avoid his attempt to have them crop-dusted into anaesthetic sleep. They scale the mountain in time to see the trio of flashing spacecraft materialise once again and fly back and forth, hovering just above the ground winking at the scientists. At last, having determined that the benevolent Lacombe (and in this sense Truffaut is well cast) wishes them no harm, the trio depart to summon the mother ship.

Nothing that has gone before quite prepares one for the size or magnificence of this flying castle: its crenellated shape, its plethora of antennae, knobs and protrusions, above all its multitude of lights. It is a creation of great beauty. The film was, in one

sense, made so that it could be put on display. Having communicated ('It's teaching us its alphabet') by playing a fortissimo tune, the mother ship lowers its undercarriage. There emerges a matchstick creature—only dimly glimpsed but with an unmistakably human form—who spreads his arms and then moves them slowly up and down. Before the appearance of this saviour, however, the little boy toddles out of the craft and is reunited with Gillian; a number of other individuals, including the pilots of the planes we encountered in the first reel, also emerge dazed but apparently unharmed. Matters are brought to a head when a line of faceless red-suited, crew-cut astronauts march towards the craft; prudently held in reserve for just such a contingency, their hour has now arrived. They march out to chance their luck aboard the mother ship, and the last of their number, hastily added to the back of the line, is the euphoric Neary. Finally, his long search for a meaning behind his possession has been revealed; he goes to meet the future.

Spielberg's method in creating a sense of awe-struck rather than ominous tension is based on the premise that his audience should be told nothing about what is going on. The screen is filled with activity—the worst offenders in this respect are the scientists, who spend a great deal of time physically running about—but Spielberg elects to cut away from the unfinished episodes of which the film is mostly composed just before we seem to be getting hold of what he's driving at. In *Jaws*, tension was partly created by an expectation (periodically fulfilled) that something horrible was indeed going to happen; in *Close Encounters*, we have been kept waiting so long to find out what is behind the horizon, what the scientists are up to, why Neary feels compelled to build model mountains, that by the time these questions finally become irrelevant we have had time to ask—as we never did in *Jaws*—why they were so fruitlessly posed in the first place. An argument can be made that Spielberg aimed at creating an entertainment (the jokey tone suggests more than simply a tipped cap to Hitchcock), but on the whole that pruned down narrative craftsmanship displayed in all his other features is absent. He does, it is true, make a nominal effort to link the elements of his non-narrative (in the first scene we see the lost planes, in the last it is revealed what became of their pilots), but in terms of embellishing the action he does little to develop motive or characterisation (we are, by the end of the movie, no wiser about what ordinary Roy Neary feels about his life and what has happened to him than we were at the beginning). *Close Encounters* is a little like a circus show: we are asked to marvel at its parts; we live in hope that the ring-master's hyperbole will be fulfilled; we know that the trapeze artists will come to no harm since we can see the safety net.

In recent years, we have witnessed the spectacular resurgence of the American popular entertainment movie: the three examples which stand out, primarily because they have demonstrated how out-dated are the figures by which we normally measure (or anticipate) movie profits, are—of course—*Jaws*, *Star Wars* and now *Close Encounters*. It is worth, I think, considering what these at

THE AMERICAN FIEND

Karen Jaehne

Since Jean Seberg sold *Herald Tribunes* in *A Bout de Souffle*, the American has become uglier and uglier in the European cinema. Whether directly depicted or merely implied, the traces of cultural imperialism have been reflected and lamented, especially by the directors of the New German cinema who have experienced American imperialism both culturally and politically. In their most recent films, Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog have reshaped the myth of the Ugly American by bringing the norms of the two societies into conflict, and by showing how fragile that human aspect of 'Old Europe' is in the face of the American friend/fiend. The American Dream is the guiding force in Herzog's *Stroszek*, offering Bruno S. and Eva escape from the brutal capitalism of back-alley prostitution. *The American Friend* owes its title not only to Dennis Hopper's invasion of Hamburg to play an identity-seeking amateur criminal, but to Wenders' rendering of the indirect question, 'what money can buy'. Each film is about the corruption of a young German with clearly limited possibilities: Zimmermann in *The American Friend* faces an imminent death, and Bruno in *Stroszek* a social death trap. 'America to the rescue' turns out to be an influence more pernicious than the Teutonic trap, which seems to consist in conformity, narrow rooms and dark corners. The opportunity or refuge from fate offered by the American element in each film is firmly bound to the idea of 'individualism', which actually turns out to be isolation.

Stroszek is neatly divided between the old world of Berlin shadows and the new world, lying under one mammoth shadow. When Bruno S. is released from prison, he seems to be just rounding the track of another relay race. 'It all moves in circles,' he shouts, above the mild admonitions of a functionary at the prison. Bruno's cry has the prophetic tone of all his proclamatory acting in Herzog's films. The movement within the film then fulfils Bruno's worst fears: from prison to freedom and back again has until now been the pattern, and when Berlin's working class district, Kreuzberg, proves to be a static ghetto of static violence, Bruno tries to widen the circle to extend to the shores of American freedom. The circle then becomes a motif of absurdity, which can be traced from the clawing dance of the glassy-eyed chicken to the machine that carries Bruno in circles even after his death. This feigned movement is an image of America running in circles, where the potential for violence is brilliantly depicted by two farmers on their tractors, shotguns in hand, ploughing a disputed piece of land.

Bruno's prediction on leaving prison, 'Bruno goes into Freedom', reaches beyond his immediate delusion of a freedom which hangs on the conformity advised by the prison governor. 'Promise me, Bruno,' he says, 'you will never touch another drop of alcohol.' 'Great Hungarian Word of Promise,' promises Bruno, and goes straight to the pub around the corner to enjoy his first

'Stroszek': 'It all moves in circles'



pint of freedom. His movement through the city introduces us to his world—a corner of Berlin close to the Wall, narrow, dark as *film noir*. The gangsters are mean and tough; the hooker desperate and in need of a way out. Hunched, heavy-coated backs fill the screen, and the camera seems to be too far away to let us see what is really going on between the pimps and Eva (Eva Mathes) until she is slapped across the room. Bruno, our hero, rescues the maiden and escapes, not to Freedom but to America.

Herzog projects his obsession with Fate in this film into an American darkness that will eventually absorb Bruno. In Berlin, Bruno lives in a sort of pact of destiny with the darkness and seems to have no great expectations. His friends are there to greet him when he emerges from prison. His old friend Herr Scheitz (Clemens Scheitz) returns his mynah bird, Beo, while Eva restores his energy with a large cup of coffee which he appreciates for its blackness, as he sits down again to his old friend, a looming, dark piano. In his own dark corner he is reconciled to the darkness that is embodied in his music and an old European atmosphere.

Bruno is the kind of hero whose very alienation would be his saving grace, if he were not to get mixed up with Woman. In a role-reversal, Eva tries to 'take him away from all this'—the brutality that her own invasion of his world has caused—and they emigrate to Railroad Flats (Wisconsin, Plainsfield), where railroads have been replaced by trucks. Eva gets a job serving in a truck-stop and quickly adapts to easy-going American ways, trying to beat the payments on their colour TV and mobile home as a part-time hooker. Herr Scheitz develops a marvellous theory about measuring animal magnetism in people with a geiger counter. The Americans he encounters don't understand him, of course, and if they did, they wouldn't believe it. Nothing changes in Bruno's destiny; there is no solace in transition, for he only moves from his private corner of darkness to an entire land plunged into darkness. After a few *de rigueur* scenes of happiness on the Empire State Building, this bizarre trio sets off on the trail, towards a massive black cloud. The soundtrack carries an American 'road' song, a watered-down FM version of Leonard Cohen's 'Are you goin' away with no word of farewell?' This ominous beginning is repeated in a later scene where Bruno is in inner exile in America.

Bruno, the backyard minstrel, has to carry on his fight for survival in America as a mechanic. Instead of the classical music of his piano and the Brechtian lyrics of his organ-grinding entertainment, we now hear the tinsel twang of a music-box voice, 'Happy we'll dwell, my silver bell', as Bruno and Eva begin to live the American Dream, which is not so much a dream as a last resort. The music of America is painfully insipid, in contrast to what Bruno himself created; and in the way Herzog presents it, seems to be rooted in the sort of primitive chant that fascinates the director in *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*. Two scenes in particular use this nursery rhyme routine in the act of humiliating Bruno. In the first, his 'boss' acts out a jingle of Eva's change purse with his hips—'hit the penny, hit the nickel, hit the dime, hit the quarter. . . '—while Bruno cringes in a corner. In the second, an

auctioneer chants the auction of his mobile home in an incomprehensible spill of syllables, leaving Bruno stripped of his house as well as his love.

At this point, Bruno and Herr Scheitz plunge into the American Way of Life—as they understand it—and rob a cash register of \$22, spending it across the street on a cold turkey. This subtle bit of Americana escapes some German audiences, but is a hilarious symbolic variation on Herzog's obsession with fowl and simultaneously incorporates what it means to break a habit 'cold turkey'. Bruno's habit has been to bend with the wind, literally depicted in Berlin when he bent over his piano, forced by Eva's former pimps to wear a bell on his head. The pimps' violence had also been linked to the influence of American standards, in a cut to the street where they stand next to a shiny American car. The contradictions of the American Dream must inevitably be resolved by prostitution: to achieve the goal of 'something for nothing', one has to sell oneself or someone else. But Herzog's America is not full of prostitutes and criminals typical of New German Cinema films. Indeed, his Americans have no excess of dignity, and their casual attitude is a veil for more insidious purposes. Even the act of prostitution is draped in seduction when we are shown how it all operates at the truck-stop. A trucker approaches Eva: '... right behind the restaurant, and on the side of my truck it says Slippery Slip Van Web. And all you do is knock on my door and I'll let you in.' It seems that in America money is slipped back and forth, under the guise of friendliness. Perhaps the sleaziest scene in Herzog's film is that with the debt collector from the bank, a scene worthy of Altman, as the slick young man blushes at the sight of Eva's pile of bills: 'We usually only accept credit cards.' He is thoroughly convincing.

It is the wheeling and dealing that separates Bruno and Eva, for she can do it in an offhand manner, as was evident back in Berlin's back-alley, while Bruno has nothing to sell. Increasingly, he is equated with the American Indian, first through his fellow worker and ultimately when he seeks refuge and dies on the Indian Reservation in North Carolina. The immigrant and invader is embodied in Eva and her decision to migrate with the truckers on their long-distance runs to Canada. Bruno takes off in the other direction and drives until he comes to a Reservation where the Indians have turned to exploitation, selling their very ethnicity, and where a chicken and rabbits dance and make music for a coin stuck in their cage. Here Bruno takes his last free ride in America.

This American attitude towards life is captured in the way Herzog uses animals as a motif, parallel to human development. 'What kind of land is it that takes Bruno's Beo away from him?' This line has been used in advertising for the film, and it expresses Bruno's first loss in America. The customs authorities can no more appreciate Bruno's attachment to Beo than he can understand their reasons for depriving him of his pet. The same gap of understanding provides comic relief when Herr Scheitz attempts to measure the animal magnetism of two dead deer and explain his ideas to two indifferent hunters. The life of animals is a measure of the general indifference to life which Bruno meets in Railroad Flats, where his boss is obsessed

with a recent murder. Where the Cherokees parade as Indians, animals parade as machines in a sensational attraction that is surely the most absurd element in Herzog's work: the last sequence cuts back and forth from the glassy eye of the chicken dancing in circles to the burned-out tow-truck running down in circles and Bruno caught dead on the circling ski-lift, in a fulfilment of his prediction, 'It all moves in circles.'

The same circle can be found at the end of Wenders' *The American Friend*, as the car first goes out of control on the beach and then carries the dead Jonathan (Bruno Ganz) around in circles. In contrast to Herzog's Bruno, he has succumbed to the temptation of the American and sold himself. But the essential difference in their portrayals of the American art of seduction lies in the directors' opposite notions of destiny. Wenders shows a man suddenly slipping into a materialist conception of his own worth as he develops a friendship with an American who dabbles in crime. Dennis Hopper, in a Stetson, is not the image of a man in search of his soul, but his nightmare mumblings reveal that he doesn't know who he is any more. Wenders' dry sense of humour lets Ripley's existential *angst* be mechanised, as he tapes his confessions on a recorder. 'I know less and less who I am,' he says in a conscious confession, quite different from the directorial dictum in the final shot of Bruno in *Stroszek*, with a sign on the back of his chair, 'Is this really me?' The American lack of self-knowledge infects the European environment. Wenders' resentment of the mechanisation of life has been evident in previous films (the destruction of the TV in *Alice in the Cities*; the abandoned guard hut on the border in *Kings of the Road*); but instead of showing the European drowning in Americana, he is treating the lost American. Towards the end, Jonathan sweeps his secure little shop to the tune of 'I pity the poor immigrant' (Wenders' usual Bob Dylan soundtrack), then greases his palm with a piece of gold leaf, contemplatively.

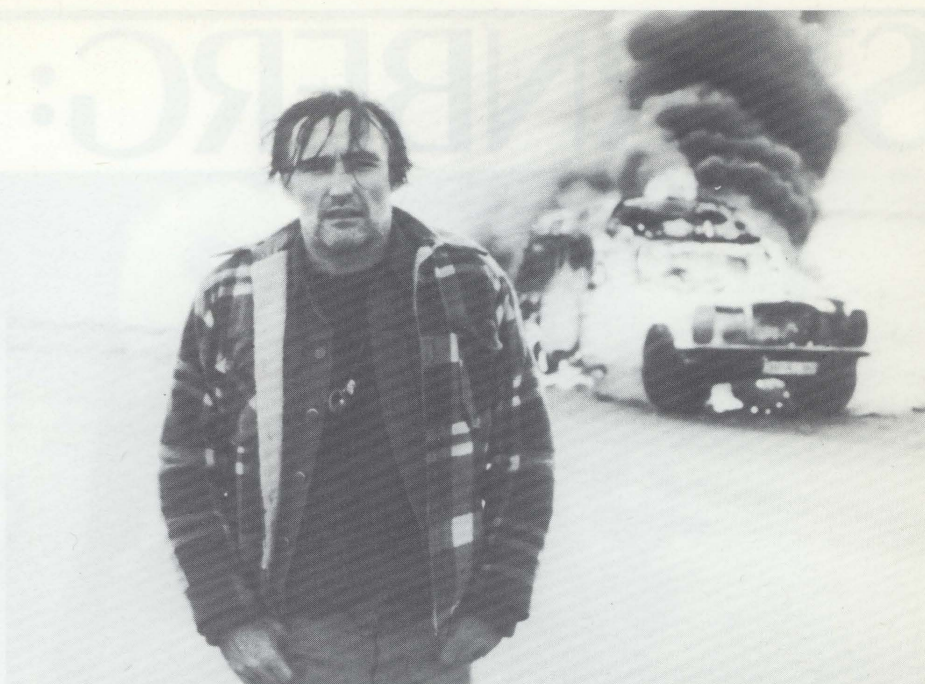
Wenders deals with prostitution in an oblique way. The landscape of Paris may have been raped, and characters like Ripley may decorate European mansions with pool tables, Wurlitzers, cornflakes and ketchup bottles, which all looks like rape; but the Europeans themselves are seduced, and thus share in the debilitation of their own values. The ironic stroke of presenting Jonathan in a picture-framing shop—Patricia Highsmith's invention in the novel—allows for sundry shots of Jonathan behind his own frames, with intimations of the expression 'frame-up'. But the frame functions as a symbolic device in both sides of the conflict.

Jonathan's nearly extinct craftsmanship is depicted in the precision with which he squares the corners so perfectly, showing Tom Ripley his workshop with the pride of a master. Ripley's exploitation of Jonathan also begins in the shop with his ambiguous signals of friendship, but every scene seems to be part of the frame-up, because even if it is money which motivates Jonathan to murder, the decision seems to be released from morality by his contact with Ripley, whose casual behaviour introduces a tone of relativity. His bony frame slumped upon the heater in Jonathan's shop looks like a marionette out of work, and Marianne

Zimmermann's reaction to him is one of intuitive suspicion and curiosity. And because she is not like him, she is not vulnerable as her husband is to the friendship Ripley offers. Her femininity is at once a refuge and a responsibility for Jonathan, reflected through the tight shots and 'family close-ups' as well as by Wenders' use of primary colours. Red, blue and yellow dominate the film, especially in the scenes with Jonathan's family.

The atmosphere of the tiny apartment and the intimacy of the Zimmermanns' private life is gradually eclipsed by elegant dolly shots of Jonathan vacillating between the public world of the Paris Métro or the Trans European Express, and Jonathan seen through frames in his Paris hotel room or in the toilet mirror on the train, testing the sensual effect of the murder weapon on his own throat. In such shots of Jonathan, for example with the revolver in his mouth like a lollipop, we are forced to recognise his need to compensate for his own impending death through the very irrelevance of the murder. Its victims remain quite anonymous and, as Jonathan becomes more confident about what he is supposed to be doing on these missions, the 'Mafiosi' take on a more absurd character. In the Métro the target looks normally undistinguished until Jonathan is ready to shoot: the camera closes in on his broad, black back and suddenly this massive aspect of death comes rolling back down the escalator after Jonathan. The murder scenes are, on the whole, made fairly comical. Jonathan's surprise at his success in the Métro is imparted to us by means of a delightfully illogical move. Wenders suddenly places us in an observation room somewhere in the labyrinth of the Métro with three TV screens before us, each showing Jonathan in flight from the murder. The camera pulls back to reveal that the machine has been left running, and nobody is taking advantage of this wonderful safeguard. The visual motifs of Jonathan framed and of Jonathan lost in empty public spaces are brilliantly combined here in Wenders' silent use of images to comment on who's minding the store.

Jonathan is plunged into a modernity that is nebulously connected with Tom Ripley. Ripley's alienation in Europe—à la Brando from *Last Tango*—is most palpable in his visits to Jonathan. His attempt to sneak along the cobbled streets is made ludicrous by his white Thunderbird; but these visits represent what Ripley seems to be looking for in Europe, the Old Europe that is by now an illusion even to the Europeans. The very vagueness of Tom Ripley's existence in Hamburg—he's neither comfortable nor confined by life in his white mansion—is attractive, even if the friendship he offers has invisible strings attached. One viewing of *The American Friend* is not enough to untangle the attachments of the various shades of criminality or motivation; by leaving out all the clues, Wenders has raised the thriller from the level of 'who did what to whom' to 'who seems to be what he's not'. And by casting a weird collection of film directors as criminals, Wenders has cast his own lot in there with them. He has made an American-style, action-packed thriller, without losing the thematic thread common to all his films: out of common need, two antithetic characters build a friendship that exists as a value in and of itself, mysteriously relieving them of their isolation for the short time it lasts.



'The American Friend': Dennis Hopper as Tom Ripley.

The twist with the American friendship is that its effect is fatal. Despite his wife's attempt to save him, Jonathan dies at the end. His death makes it hard for us to think of him as the murderer, especially since the friendship has taken a new turn with Jonathan helping Tom. The humour of their mutual rescue missions becomes less and less subtle, until their previous victim arrives back on the scene, wired for life in an ambulance which they storm and hijack. At this point, their identities have merged in a cops-and-robbers game that pulls even Marianne into the action. Tom Ripley and Marianne have a showdown in which she proves to be the stronger. She gets Jonathan back, but his chronic illness (which was everybody's excuse for getting him into this mess) suddenly erupts and he dies, as he expected.

The perennial American friend is left abandoned on the beach, after setting fire to the ambulance in a scene strangely tangential to Bruno letting his tow-truck burn out. This is not the only situation that the two films share. The shady manipulation of the characters' lives by capitalism is represented in each film by an auction. Wenders begins his film with an auction at which a forged painting is sold at DM62,000. It doesn't make any difference if it is expensive or a forgery, since the dealer, an American, 'can get rid of it in Texas'. The understatement in bidders' behaviour at an auction signals us to pay attention to other kinds of swindling. The auction in *Stroszek* is a climax of misunderstanding, conducted in an artificial language that is not a means of communication at all. For both Wenders and Herzog, language is suspended at the point of utmost desperation where the only order left in the world is the maleficent grinding of the machine, and the hero's soul and free will have been captured in some grander, more insidious mechanism. As Herzog's Bruno drinks his last cup of coffee, an anonymous American says to him, 'Your car is kaput, your girl ran off and they sold your house, and you think nothing of it.' Bruno's silence, like that of Jonathan when

his wife demands an explanation of his strange behaviour, is a 'subjective' correlative, as it were, to society's indifference as moral values slip away.

Although he is technically a criminal, the hero's moral innocence in the face of social frame-ups is reinforced by the fact that his motivation was fair—and in the interest of the fair sex, at that. Bruno suffers to protect Eva and emigrates with her, but she causes him the same pain in America. Jonathan is willing to take the risk of murder in order to leave some insurance for Marianne and his son. The women prove to be stronger than anyone had reckoned with, and the most American quality they seem to have acquired is survival—a survival of the fittest. The men, on the other hand, must learn how to handle a gun and take life's game beyond the limits of mere survival. It would seem, in fact, that both Wenders and Herzog ridicule men playing with guns. Jonathan forgets to hide his gun under his coat, then realises it with an embarrassed movement, as if his fly were unzipped. In *Stroszek*, it is a patent American absurdity to tote a shotgun while ploughing or for Bruno to point a gun at a barber, but the absurdity reaches tragic dimensions when Bruno rides off on the ski-lift with a shotgun. All in all, the German characterisations take on a wry quality, since Bruno and Jonathan have to grapple more with their guns than with their victims. But the violence that men can produce with such weapons is nothing compared to the destruction that the American Way of Life reaps in the sphere of everyday morality.

The consolation for the social loss appears to be American popular music, whose lyrics seem to have replaced Fowler's *Guide to English Usage*. This is perhaps the key to the affinity young Germans feel to the 'American Consciousness in Crisis', a category which certain Berlin cinemas have attached to certain Hollywood productions in the wake of *Easy Rider*. But no matter how well received, the American influence of music and film in the Federal Republic of Germany reflects the kind of cultural imperialism that turns friend to fiend.

STERNBERG:



Marlene Dietrich in 'The Devil is a Woman'

THE CONTEXT of PASSION

Don Willis

In Josef von Sternberg's classic *The Blue Angel* (1930), the staid Professor Rath (Emil Jannings) becomes enamoured of cabaret artist Lola-Lola (Marlene Dietrich). When, rather abruptly, he proposes to her in her backstage dressing room, she begins laughing helplessly, steps away from him in disbelief and surprise, then throws her arms open to embrace him and accept. Mockery, amusement, pleasure and affection—all in one continuous movement. In its acute sense of the arbitrary, this moment is like a Sternberg film in miniature.

That Sternberg's wit is equalising rather than exalting may make his films seem cold: in the terms of this scene from *The Blue Angel*, for instance, affection and indifference seem to be simply two undifferentiated points on an emotional spectrum. But if his films seem to mock and dissect passion, it is, paradoxically, as the only subject worth dissecting; and that paradox is at the heart equally of Sternberg's comic, ironic dramas—*The Blue Angel*, *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), *The Devil is a Woman* (1935)—and of his ironic romantic melodramas—*Morocco* (1930), *Dishonoured* (1931), *Shanghai Express* (1932). Although the facts of love have rarely been examined as precisely as they are in Sternberg's films, they are also, ironically, secondary to his mocking wit, his sense of their absolute dependence on chance. His films are almost pure emotion, but emotion always in quotes, in a mocking context like the full range of Lola-Lola's response to Rath in the proposal scene.

Sternberg's carnival-baroque visual style resembles Fellini's, but his sense of character is oddly closer to the austere Bresson's. His characters don't 'develop'; they are essentially complete in their first scene in a film. They are essences, and the stripping away of superfluities reveals the workings of chance, as in Bresson's films it reveals the operation of divine grace. In *Scarlet Empress*, Marlene Dietrich as Catherine the Great doesn't evolve; she simply transforms, from essence of (mock) innocence to essence of experience, as in *Dishonoured* Dietrich as spy at one point transforms herself into a mock-naïve peasant girl. Victor McLaglen in *Dishonoured* is characterised almost exclusively by his outsize cynical grin, which seizes him whenever he is in danger of betraying emotion. John Lodge in *Scarlet Empress* is all clenched teeth. In the same tradition, Clive Brook's Doc Harvey in *Shanghai Express* is a marvellous caricature of a stiff-upper-lip British officer. In *The Docks of New York* (1928), Sternberg's staging and framing suggest that Betty Compson and Olga Baclanova are less two different characters than incarnations of the same disillusioned woman at two points in her life; in her Sternberg films Dietrich's ambivalence improves on this idea of bifurcation, suggesting as it does a synthesis of the Compson and Baclanova characters, or, roughly, of hope and despair.

The electric connections between characters bypass psychology and sociology. In *The Blue Angel*, the stage manager/magician Kiepert (Kurt Gerron) torments Professor Rath for no apparent reason. Early in the film, Rath defends Lola against a patron's advances and in the process, it's true, does strike Kiepert. But as a response Kiepert's behaviour seems out of all proportion. Rath's attack—a seemingly insignificant act at the time, almost lost in the general uproar—in retrospect acquires (thanks to Kiepert's persistence) a significance equal to his proposal of marriage to Lola. One action appears to have a mysterious connection with the other: it's as if the attack on Kiepert were a distorting mirror image of the proposal. Held up to it, it reveals Rath's temerity with Lola to be a subtle outrage of the scheme of things.

In part it is the odd postponement of the reconciling of accounts with Rath that depersonalises or abstracts the reconciling in *The Blue Angel*; and a similar mechanism is at work in *Morocco*. Adjutant Caesar (Ulrich Haupt) at one point pokes Legionnaire Brown (Gary Cooper) in the ribs with a fan. Later, in combat, Caesar is about to shoot Brown in the back (for a past affair with Caesar's wife) when he is himself shot by an enemy gunner. His gun hand drops back lifeless, and his body slides slowly down a 60° incline. The deliberateness of the shot of Caesar's body seems to have nothing to do with the rest of the sequence—and everything to do with that one insolent poke in the ribs, which makes concrete the insolence of his intention to kill Brown, indeed defines that intention as insolence. The mechanics of retribution in *Shanghai Express* are more obvious. The film is constructed on the relatively swift retribution exacted by Chang (Warner Oland) for the insolence of the opium magnate Baum (Gustav von Seyffertitz) and that of Captain Harvey, and the dramatic climax is the murder of Chang

himself by Hui Fei (Anna May Wong) for his sexual presumption with her. If in *Shanghai Express* Chang and Hui Fei seem simply to be acting for themselves, the machine-gunner in *Morocco* and Kiepert in *The Blue Angel* seem to be acting for some other agency. It is the difference between pique and fate.

In the narration Sternberg wrote and speaks for *Anatahan* (1953), he makes his intentions (in that film and in earlier films) more explicit: 'He had been marked for death indelibly long ago—the only thing we did not know was who would be the executioner.' That might be an epitaph for Caesar, as 'Careless as we might wish to be in our relationships with others, there is a time of accounting' might be one for Rath.

In the climactic sequence of *The Blue Angel*, Kiepert forces Rath, who has married Lola and joined the troupe, to perform as a clown in his home town. Very reluctantly, Rath becomes the butt of Kiepert's gags on stage, before all his former associates and students. At one point in the act, after pulling a dove out of Rath's top hat, Kiepert appears ready to stop. But the audience clamours for more and, almost reluctantly, he produces eggs and breaks them on Rath's head. His hesitation demonstrates, again, that he is only an agent (if generally quite willing) of some larger process, and it is in effect just a momentary, inexplicable break in that process, an ironic relaxation before the final tightening of the screws. There's a similar meaning in an incidental shot that occurs just before Rath and Kiepert go on stage: the helpless Rath sitting immobile in his dressing room, as Kiepert busily affixes the clown nose and adjusts the collar for him. The show will go on—the process, once started, is unstoppable, and Rath, like Kiepert, becomes only its agent.



Dietrich in her Sternberg films is a 'force of nature', a comic erotic tempest. Near the end of *The Devil is a Woman*, the notorious siren Concha Perez (Dietrich) remarks, apparently apropos of nothing, 'I used to work in a cigarette factory.' If this stray line is intended to account for her reverse exploitation of men and square everything psychologically and sociologically, it doesn't quite. The sense of disproportion between her fantastic exploits and her unremarkable origins makes the line a joke, almost a *non sequitur*. One fact of her career has something to do with the other, but only as the fact of one's dying has something to do with the fact of one's being born, that is, certainly, but very vaguely. There is an odd comic logic to the connection between factory girl and legendary Lorelei, but a logic that makes Concha less a character than an avenging comic Fury.

Although the facts that Concha worked in a factory, that Don Pasqual (Lionel Atwill) is an aristocrat and Antonio (Cesar Romero) is a revolutionary, are not entirely insignificant, they count for rather less than the fact that she is of one sex and they are of the other. That's the essential fact. She's a sexual, not a social demon (and, not incidentally, funny as hell). When Concha, going for a little ride, asks her 'Pasqualito' to see her off in her carriage from his balcony, he walks out and she waves an insolent, gay goodbye and rides away with her latest lover, the bullfighter. Fate is nothing if not witty in Sternberg, and he turns the stuff of romance and tragedy into

high, biting comedy. Were Concha a shade more human or Pasqual a shade less, her outrages might not be so funny, but the reality of his humiliation is checked and balanced by her abstracted callousness. The relationship is hilariously impersonal.

Concha toys with his love instinctively, automatically. If she's cruel to him, it is not necessarily intentionally, only incidentally, as a result of her (shall we say) indecisiveness, which is just her way, as bull-like blundering is his way. Neither is Lola malicious, and Amy Jolly's hasty parting embrace of her fiancé La Bessière (Adolphe Menjou), in *Morocco*, is not insincere. Dietrich isn't a sadist in her Sternberg films; as fate she just happens to be cruel sometimes. The relationships of Lola and Rath, Amy and La Bessière, Lily and Harvey (*Shanghai Express*) and Concha and Don Pasqual are not founded on calculated cruelty or meanness. Lola and Amy's tenderness seems intended to absolve them of any blame for the injuries done to Rath and to La Bessière. More importantly, it directs attention elsewhere—to the impersonal forces behind the personal relationships.

Concha's most intriguing line is 'I kissed you because I loved you, for a minute.' It can't make too much difference to Don Pasqual whether she is lying or telling the truth, but the structure of the film suggests it is the truth, that Concha is the maddening embodiment of a comically impermanent love—'impermanent' in her case meaning perhaps two or three seconds, which is arguably no better, and maybe worse, than no love at all. At one point Concha calls Don Pasqual's love simple vanity, but the Sternberg-John Dos Passos script methodically pares away such facile 'explanations' as irrelevant, the better to isolate passion and caprice.

Luis Buñuel, in *Cet Obscur Objet du Désir*, his new film from the Pierre Louys story that is the basis for *The Devil is a Woman*, also deals single-mindedly with passion and caprice, but his emphasis is different. Where Sternberg takes Don Pasqual's passion for granted and focuses on the dazzling configurations of his heroine's capriciousness, Buñuel investigates the nature of his hero's passion. Like Sternberg, Buñuel pares away all explanations for Mathieu's desire for Conchita. There is no explanation for him or for her—just the fact. He wants where, simply, she doesn't want. His exclamation upon discovering the impregnable corset that she wears to bed—'My God, what is it!'—is as appropriate on another level as a response to his *inclination* as it is, on that level, to her *disinclination*. Buñuel can finally say only what passion is *not*. To underscore the blindness, the inexplicability of Mathieu's love, he cast two actresses as Conchita Perez. That love, Buñuel so suggests, could just as well have been for some other woman—half the time it *is* for some other woman. It's all in his mind. This calculated freak casting coup emphasises not Conchita's unreasonableness but Mathieu's. Buñuel reverses the intent of Sternberg's film, but at the same time clarifies that intent, illuminates through his own preoccupations those of Sternberg. Buñuel explores passion itself, Sternberg its context.

In *The Blue Angel*, Lola flatters Rath, only to blow her make-up powder in his face, only gently to caress and dust it off him. The caprice is a condition of the affection. At their

wedding party, Kiepert magically produces two eggs from Rath's nose, prompting Lola to cluck adoringly at her husband, in turn prompting him to crow proudly. Ridicule and warmth intertwine. On stage at the end, Kiepert again produces eggs, then cracks them on Rath's head; Rath spies Lola backstage with Mazeppa, the strong man (Hans Albers), and—is it thanks to Kiepert's instructions to him to crow or to Lola's dallying?—he begins to explode, crowing crazily. Rath's crowing in the film is a sign of, in turn, foolish pride, happiness, humiliation, defiance, pain. That one action should stand in for so many emotions suggests that one emotion gives birth to or produces the next, and so on, as Kiepert produces one egg after another, like magic.

Ironically, the latter sequence's equivalent of Lola's clucking endearments to Rath is her embrace of Mazeppa. In the crazy mirror world of the film, those endearments seem, by a slight transposition, to make Rath explode—that in effect is the sense of these two variations on the same scene, the idyllic and the nightmarish. Happiness predicated on unhappiness. It is as if the genie of *The*

Blue Angel had granted Rath's wish but somehow neglected to mention the price. Freedom of choice begins to look like tyranny of choice at the end of the chain reaction that Rath sets in motion. In the script's idiosyncratic terms, the progression is from Professor Rath assertively blowing his nose before his students to his passively being made up as a clown, complete with false nose, to perform before them.



A Sternberg film is built on paradox and dichotomy, its essence fixed not by one particular image that can be isolated, but by a particular pair of images, or series of images or motifs. At the end of *Dishonoured*, the chief of the Austrian secret service (Gustav von Seyffertitz) salutes agent X-27 (Dietrich) after she has been executed for allowing a Russian spy, H-14 (Victor McLaglen) to escape. He recognises her act of treason for what it was—an act of love. Earlier, the same man disgustingly dismisses a policeman who salutes him only after discovering who he is, the policeman's salute signifying just an empty respect for appearances. The last shot

signifies (as does the whole film) appearances be damned; which it wouldn't, at least not so precisely, without the earlier shot.

In the wedding sequence in *Scarlet Empress*, the chiffon handkerchief that binds together the hands of the half-witted Grand Duke Peter (Sam Jaffe) and the innocent, betrayed Catherine later becomes the cloth napkin which the more worldly Catherine angrily knots at the dinner table when Peter calls her a fool. The two actions carry the overtones 'Catherine passive' and 'Catherine active', and together describe a corrupted Catherine. In turn, the napkin becomes the towel with which her accomplice Orloff strangles Peter. Thus twice transposed, the wedding cloth becomes a garotte, an evolution not unnatural only in the world of *Scarlet Empress*, in which power is all and to which an egalitarian idea like 'husband' and 'wife' is alien.

The Shanghai Gesture (1941) is a Sternberg image set without a film: namely, a virtuoso crane into the depths of a gambling pit near the beginning and a complementary crane out again at the end, echoed by more clipped tracks into the gamblers themselves. As an evocation of a human vortex of feeling and chance, this is as electric and concise a 'fix' on the Sternberg theme as there is. And Sternberg takes this imagery a step further, directly linking the main characters to the cranes and tracks: the first crane shot is punctuated by a shot of Victor Mature offering the two women flanking him cigarettes. Later, there's an odd cut from assorted flunkies offering magnate Walter Huston a light to a track in to the roulette table. And twice Sternberg dissolves from gambling czarina Ona Munson's face into similar tracks. Unfortunately, it's a case of editing and camerawork accomplishing in seconds what dull plot and duller talk fail to do in 90-plus minutes. The relationships between the characters are at best amorphous, and Sternberg's light doesn't so much play over Gene Tierney's face as illuminate its perfect blankness. The Sternberg Dietrich suggests ambiguous feelings; Gene Tierney suggests nothing, and her actressy strenuousness is the reverse of Dietrich's easy insolence. The symmetrical crane shots are just a beautiful beginning.

But perhaps Sternberg's most brilliant, aesthetically exhilarating use of symmetrical images occurs in *The Devil is a Woman*, in which he employs them to describe the caprice of his heroine. The first of the two shots (both in deep focus) simply shows a coach coming up a pass driving an errant flock of sheep before it. Inside the coach are Concha and her lover Antonio, on the way to the train which will carry them away from Seville and Don Pasqual. On the surface, a rather unremarkable transition shot. At the last minute, however, Concha changes her mind, and she watches the stunned Antonio as he leaves on the train without her. The final shot of the film, also in deep focus, is of the coach returning down the pass—again scattering the sheep before it—back to town and Don Pasqual. One shot is a pretty picture; the two shots together are a philosophy of life. *Capriccio Espagnol* was the title Sternberg wanted for the film, and that was the film he shot. It is appropriate for a film in which the most important shot is a 'transition' shot.

The whole structure and design of *The Blue*

'The Blue Angel': Professor Rath (Emil Jannings) as schoolmaster, and being outfitted for his role as clown



Angel—classroom/cabaret, professor/clown, students/audience—is symmetrical. The two essential images: the spotlight that Lola swings on Rath during her performance at the beginning, and the lamp that the night watchman shines on the dying Rath as he returns to his classroom at the end. They frame his *offstage* performance with comic and rather gentle irony, marking his 'entrance' and his 'exit'. Lola, Kiepert, the clown with the frozen mock-empathetic expression and Rath's students are less characters than parts of a psychic-aesthetic whole, a completion of Rath, one summoning up the other, their insolence predicated on Rath's authoritarianism. His use of his handkerchief forms an absurd part of his regimen; Lola's panties, which he picks up in its place and with which he absently wipes his forehead, are merely an extension of that absurdity. *The Blue Angel* is a serio-comic vision of the world as fun-house-mirror image of personal sexual paranoia, a witty and sad confirmation of one's worst nightmares.

The shot of the dead Rath slumped across his desk is punctuated by the sound of applause—ostensibly for Lola in the subsequent shot.* Onstage, Rath is greeted by raucous laughter and hooting, but this abbreviated, muted applause for his death scene is less mocking, almost touching, or mock-touching, suspended between tones. As the hooting and jeering seem appropriate for his stage performance, which after all is a grotesque caricature of his life, the quiet burst of applause at the end seems right for his performance offstage.



The world of *The Devil is a Woman* is created in the image of Concha Perez, or in the reverse-image of Don Pasqual's stolidity. The script, essentially, is one scene replayed over and over—Concha teasing, tempting, then deserting him. The film is comically static, the point being in the repetition of the situation, not its dramatic development. Concha's capriciousness is invariably outrageous, and only nuances of her expression and movement distinguish one outrage from the next. The comic irony lies in the angle and lighting of her face, in the way she makes Don Pasqual bend down over her as if submitting to him, in the way her perpetually bobbing head makes her big, floppy hats bob and dip maddeningly. Sternberg fills the frame with only apparently irrelevant details and objects which, like her handkerchief that literally spells out 'Concha', figuratively spell out her name: Don Pasqual idly handling a toy puppet-man at his table, a man blowing smoke directly into his face, Don Pasqual and other functionaries brushing a suspended baby basket out of their way, a large doll carried aloft by balloons at a carnival, Concha tugging her umbrella out of Don



A Sternbergian angle on 'The Shanghai Gesture'

Paquito's hands, her coach driving the sheep before it, the necklace of hearts she wears.

This derisive imagery pervades Sternberg's films, giving them a look and feel unlike any others. It is less symbolism than visual inflection. Even simple actions like Warner Oland flicking down grape pips or Dietrich flicking cigarette ash (*Dishonoured*) act as brittle conjunctions of tone and character. Only in a Sternberg film could you find so bizarre a romantic overture as Oland and Dietrich rudely blowing noise-makers at each other, at the carnival in the same film. These derisive sounds and images function as a putting in place of individual passions, a puncturing of any sense of the self as supreme. They effectively undermine sexual and romantic complacency. The famous last shots in *Morocco*, of Amy following Legionnaire Brown into the desert, imply not 'Love conquers all' but that love is, or can be, as Andrew Sarris puts it, unconditional. The high-heeled shoes that she's forced to remove in the sand are a daftly witty correlative of the personal and social sacrifices she must make in the name of love. They're a form of understatement, a variant form.

In *Shanghai Gesture*, the caged girls hoisted aloft for auction echo the 'take' basket fished out of the gambling pit. (Women as cash; objects.) Unfortunately, Ona Munson says meaningfully, 'Then one day I found myself like those caged animals out there!' and breaks the Sternberg visual spell. As an image of fatalism, the caged girls are a wicked refinement of the balloon-borne doll in *The Devil is a Woman*, which in turn is an elaboration upon the absurd 'dancing' dolls suspended from the ceiling of Dietrich's apartment in *Dishonoured*. But the witty fatalism of Sternberg's earlier films (in *Dishonoured*, the tune 'Oh, How We Danced on the Night that We Met', and not a dud line, caps the analogy) becomes, in the context of *Shanghai Gesture*, turgid drama.

In *Dishonoured*, the crazy springing of the

dolls, when von Seyffertitz flicks them, is strangely suggestive of the motion of Dietrich's body when it is flung backwards by the impact of the bullets, at the end of the film. The meaning of the film may seem at first to lie somewhere between the snort of amused contempt with which von Seyffertitz dismisses the dancing dolls and his gallant salute of Dietrich's body; but the Dietrich-doll analogy bristles with all sorts of implications, not the least intriguing of which is that von Sternberg intends von Seyffertitz' salute to be taken ironically, not sentimentally. He is in fact the one who has enlisted Dietrich's services as a spy; thus he is also in effect the person, or agency, responsible for her execution. And so it is that, near-surrealistically, the film connects his casual flicking of the plastic dolls in one scene with the grotesque backward snap of Dietrich's body in another. It is as if, out of time, he had taken her life with a single gesture of the hand. His final salute of her body, then, is the equivalent of the ironic applause for Rath at the end of *The Blue Angel*. And wittily consonant with the script's fatalistic identification of music with dance with love with death is the fact that it is von Seyffertitz who plays 'Oh, How We Danced ...' as Sternberg intercuts shots of the dolls.



Words and actions in Sternberg's films are not to be taken at face value. Clive Brook, as Captain Harvey in *Shanghai Express*, says one minute, 'I heard from her own lips she went willingly with Chang,' and the next minute, sceptically, 'You place a lot of faith in what *Shanghai Lily* says.' He seems to want to believe her when he shouldn't and not to believe her when he should. He finds it difficult to believe good of her, and Lily, perversely, is just as willing to have bad believed of her as good. But the stolid Harvey never catches on to her maddening sort of integrity. He can't make up his mind about

* The Janus television print of the film, like the published screenplay, ends with a track back past the students' desks, away from Rath's 'spotlighted' body. This echoes an earlier track back from Rath at his desk, after he sacrifices his career for Lola. This variant of the scene is a bit literal, even contrived, as a theatre analogy (both the night watchman and the camera have to move off and away from Rath to make it good) and, after the earlier track, perhaps a bit redundant. In this version Lola's stage number begins rather than ends the sequence, so that it also lacks the eternal siren coda quality of the general theatrical version and the discreet editing conceit described here.

her, and she refuses to make it up for him.

Between dissembling and missed signals, doubt and misplaced faith, their words and looks are all but lost on each other. Near the end of the movie, Harvey asks why she's upset, why her hand is trembling. Her reply, 'That's because you touched me, Doc,' is like a true or false statement with two correct answers. If the words constitute the truth, what is the defenceless Harvey to make of the mocking delivery? The tone seems to cancel out the words, or vice versa. If, however, one assumes that Shanghai Lily is in love with Harvey, that she means what she says here, but for her own reasons doesn't particularly want Harvey to know it, then her mocking tone is like an escape clause. It allows him to accept or reject her words. If, earlier under duress, she lies believably to Harvey, here she tells the truth—unbelievably. This is how the line works—if you get it: the tone takes you right away from the words and then, as quickly, returns you to them. But Harvey doesn't get it.

There are some terrible unambiguous moments in *Shanghai Express* when Dietrich must say what she means to Warner Oland ('I love him madly!') as if she meant it, and she can't. She needs Sternberg's veils and smoke, and the ironic Sternberg-Jules Furthman lines and line readings that act as verbal veils and smoke. In the last sequence she states her love for Harvey flatly and simply, but her eyes are veiled and elusive; her manner, again, invites any response from acceptance to rejection to utter bewilderment. It leaves her (as well as him) an out, as does her (only apparently mocking?) present of a watch, to replace the one that she once gave him. He lost that watch along with, as he says, his ideals. She (mockingly?) apologises for not being able to replace them too, and the affectionate little way she straps the watch on to his wrist discomfits him as much as does her recall of his equation of the watch with his ideals. Her gesture with the watch here is as embarrassingly obvious as that equation, and the obviousness of the little ceremony undercuts it—but can, further, seem to be acting somewhat as her delivery of 'you touched me' acts, as an undercut undercutting. The words, the act, stand. The application of the principle of the too conspicuous truth is especially devastating in Sternberg's films, where appearances generally only deceive. In a Sternberg movie, what seems to be the most obvious lie must obviously be the truth. (At the carnival in *Dishonoured*, McLaglen is wearing a clown outfit and Warner Oland's costume sports a heart; the symbolism is so obvious it's oblique.)

In *Morocco*, the impassioned Amy Jolly travels halfway across Morocco to find Tom Brown. Yet when she finally catches up with him, in a saloon, her intensity vanishes, to be replaced by a slight, ironic smile. He on his part pulls down his cap to obscure his eyes and quickly spreads loose playing cards over the heart (his) and name (hers) carved into the table. She idly twirls a fan. Their words and actions in this scene count for virtually nothing. What counts are the two concrete facts behind it: her search and his carving. These are the simple facts at the centre of *Morocco*, as Shanghai Lily's hands highlighted in prayer for Harvey and her throwing in with Chang to save him are at the centre of *Shanghai Express*. The rest is a smokescreen.

Two actions also are the key to *Dishonoured*: agent X-27 committing treason by allowing her lover and opposite number to escape; and the young lieutenant in charge of the firing squad suddenly refusing, on behalf of love and women, to give the order to have her shot. They're parallel actions in that both put sentiment before duty, but while the first is clearly romantic the second is, for want of an even remotely satisfactory word, lunatic-romantic. Further, Sternberg deliberately undercuts the second by showing X-27 taking advantage of the delay and touching up her lips, as if to say 'Let's get on with it, guys.' The lieutenant's romantic outburst is quickly followed by the execution of X-27, under another officer's direction.

The unprepared viewer's first response is, necessarily, incredulity. If the sequence can be said to constitute an anti-war statement, it is only as, say, the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* constitutes an anti-war statement—that is, God knows how but somehow, in some odd corner of the viewer's violated mind. With its half-comic, half-horrific flurry of images, it reads, not necessarily in order, something like, love is sublime, love is ridiculous, love is sublime. It is unclear what exactly is undercutting what. The graphic death of X-27 seems to render the lieutenant's impassioned words just so much air, and in one sense it does: they are seen to have no practical effect. X-27 dies. But the lieutenant's outlandishly incongruous paean to love has an odd, lingering resonance. It is as if X-27's grand romantic gesture, refracted through the lieutenant's crazy-romantic gesture, had been broken down, analysed and found to be an act of insolence or presumption (or, in her country's terms, treason) implying, as in *The Blue Angel*, death. The lieutenant's speech, by its very absurdity in the context, defines it as such; it separates out, in effect, the presumption from the sentiment in her act. Love, in Sternberg's films, is granted no rights or privileges; only, at best, existence.



In a narrative which seems to be perfectly split into two sections—'innocence' and 'experience'—there is one constant in *Scarlet Empress*: Sternberg's occasional use of veils and netting to diffuse Catherine's emotions. For instance, in perhaps the key sequence of the first half, her wedding to Peter, Catherine is buried in the oppressive decor. Her presence behind her veil is signalled only by her quickened breath, which rhythmically stirs the candle flame before her face. Again, early in the second half of the film, after the birth of her baby (father uncertain), Catherine's face is seen as a blank, lost in the netting of her bed, as she cheerlessly dangles and then drops a diamond pendant given her for the occasion.

In the first image, Catherine's emotion is obviously great, but it is irrelevant to the proceedings. The innocent, passionate Catherine is lost both in the kinetic movement of the sequence upwards, which culminates in a shot of the Empress Elizabeth, the source of power, and in the general movement of the film upwards, to the climactic shot of the Empress Catherine at the top of the palace throne room.

The later image of the veiled, impassive Catherine is perhaps even more emotionally charged, but the source of emotion is indeterminate—the source seems roughly to

be the entire first half of the film filtered through, simply, the image of the twisting pendant and Catherine's eyelids, which flicker in apparent indifference. This second image is like a dim memory of the first, a picture of emotion vaguely remembered, yet an image paradoxically powerful in its evocation of loss, of a too quickly receding past.

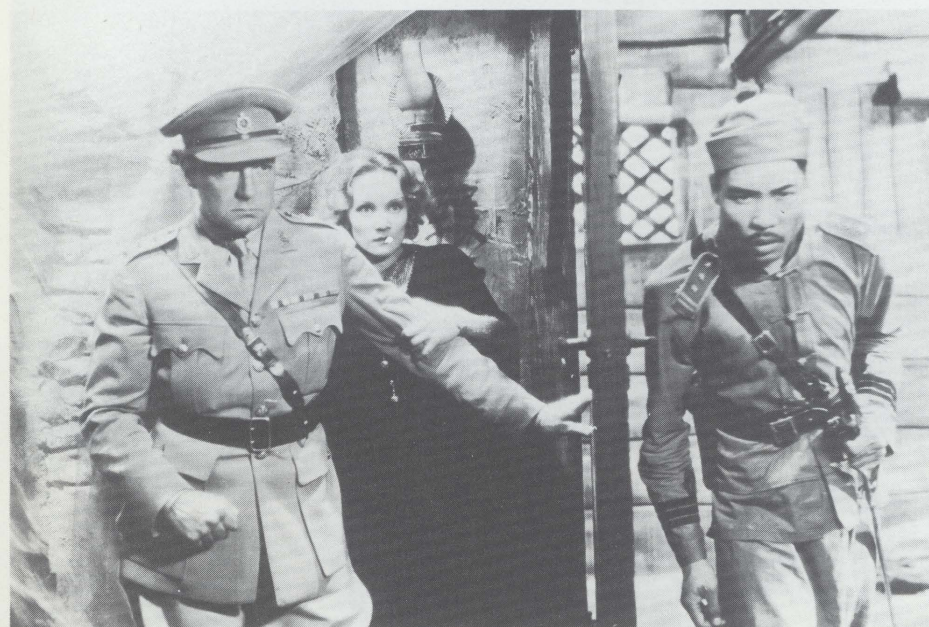
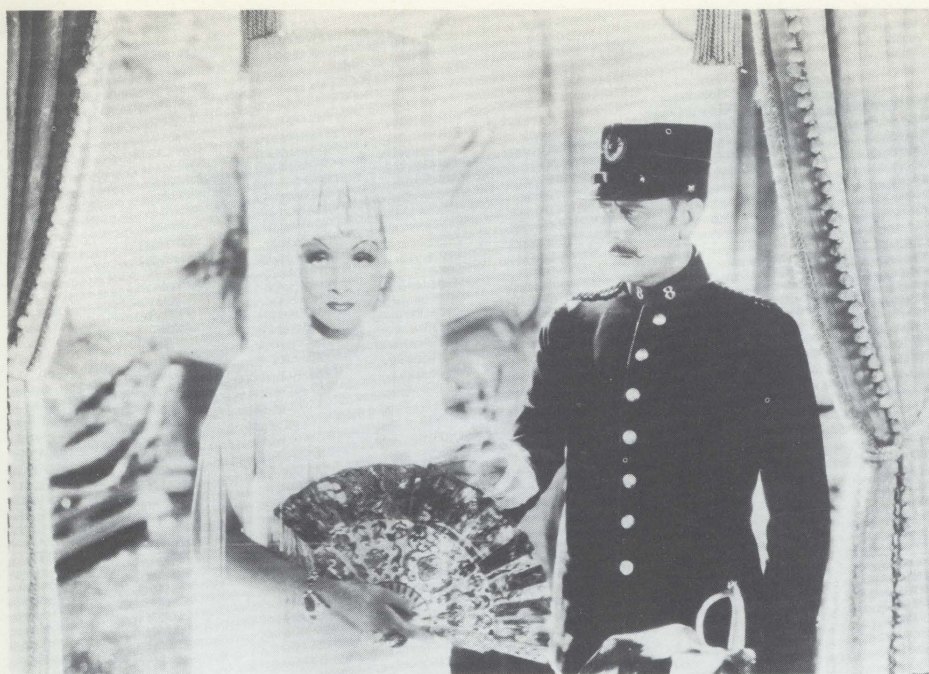
Anatahan concludes with a coda which operates on a similar emotional principle. In it the 'queen bee' Keiko (Akemi Negishi), or her spirit, again faces her 'drones', or their spirits, the men she gave life if not love to on the island. As each man steps forwards out of the shadows, she seems to recall him, and speechlessly looks down and away from him. Both she and the men are virtually expressionless—no exchange of looks could 'say' what they might want to say to each other, as nothing in Catherine's face could adequately express her emotions at the moment when she receives the pendant. Yet the emotional content of the film as a whole seems refracted in only the slight, suggestive movement of Keiko's eyes. That content isn't quite love, pity, sorrow or understanding, but something inexpressible, as is the image of Catherine in the bed. The latter shot is the closest Sternberg will come in *Scarlet Empress* to any indication of transition between the immature and the mature Catherine, any suggestion that somehow these two are the same person. Much of the film's strange power comes, rather, from the distance it puts between the two.

There is an echo of the pendant and veil image later when Catherine, as she is about to betray the man she once loved, Count Alexei (John Lodge), grasps and twists her bed netting. The twisting of the netting seems to signal revenge gladly taken on an unfaithful lover; more obliquely, it suggests loss, a transmutation of desire into hate, a corruption of emotion. It is like an objective reading of an emotional history, a conjoining of vague past and vivid present feeling. If the first half of *Scarlet Empress* caricatures Catherine's romantic passion, ideas of romance are totally absent from the second half. Yet undercut as they always are, those girlish romantic ideals somehow colour every scene in the film, giving it its elusive undertones of regret, its upside-down-fairytale air. *Scarlet Empress* might be characterised as a somehow quite serious comedy about the pretentiousness of love.



In one of the rough-cut sequences from the unfinished *I, Claudius* (1937) which appear in the BBC documentary *The Epic That Never Was*, the club-footed Claudius (Charles Laughton) hobbles along a seemingly unending line of jeering spectators at a temple entrance. This long, harrowing tracking shot establishes that there are two powerful forces at work in the film—Claudius' determination, and the world's indifference. The shot seems very much the conception of the man who created the sequence in *The Blue Angel* in which the humiliated Rath explodes on stage. It describes the world as a container of forces which refuse to be contained.

Claudius limps and stutters, but in this long tracking shot the steady rhythm of his advance is building up a sense of inexorability, a sense of the character as a defier of such obstacles—at the same time that it establishes the concreteness of those



Marlene Dietrich as Concha Perez in 'The Devil is a Woman'; with Clive Brook in 'Shanghai Express', and as Agent X-27 in 'Dishonoured'

obstacles. In the sequence in which Claudius challenges the Roman Senate, he manages, with great difficulty, to proclaim 'I, Claudius . . .' without stuttering. But his stutter soon returns ('ob . . . objections?'). Neither he nor the world will be denied. Laughton's Claudius is a fascinating contrast of masochism and sly intelligence and strength, and emotionally an almost unbearably raw performance.

The period 1934-37 is arguably the summit of Sternberg's career, and *Scarlet Empress*, *The Devil is a Woman* and the *I, Claudius* fragment arguably his greatest achievements. *The Blue Angel*, as the prototype for this formidable trio, is rather formidable itself. In between: a couple of excellent if slightly uneven films—*Morocco* and *Shanghai Express*. One that is at least sporadically brilliant—*Dishonoured*, perhaps the most delirious, disorienting Sternberg of all. (The other films are, comparatively, models of aesthetic decorum.) The rather haphazard but rather interesting *Crime and Punishment* (1935). And two misfires: *An American Tragedy* (1931), in which the director tries to make Phillips Holmes, of all actors, into Clive Brook—stoic and impassive, but you can never be sure if the actor isn't, simply, out to lunch; and *Blonde Venus* (1932), with stars Cary Grant, Herbert Marshall and Dietrich static and unresonant and Sternberg unable to shade their characterisations or develop them 'realistically'.

Before *The Blue Angel*: successful, if for the most part minor amusements. The alternately wonderful and awful *Thunderbolt* (1929); the charming if slight *Docks of New York*, marred by its sometimes strained cynicism; the gangster classic *Underworld* (1927); the tartly melancholic *The Salvation Hunters* (1925), precursor in tone of the Dietrich films. Sternberg's name appears also as director on five features after *I, Claudius*, but it would be as well to pretend that it didn't on at least four of them. It's indicative of the nature of those later films that they star some of the blandest actresses in Hollywood—Gene Tierney, Laraine Day, Jane Russell—and that the one actress whose voice was made for a Sternberg film—Gloria Grahame—has only a small part in one, *Macao* (1951), which was a minor disaster for all involved. In his last film, the mostly unfortunate *Anatahan*, only Akemi Negishi's beauty and the great last sequence recall something of Sternberg's best days and films.

Those films, finally, are less about passion than about passion's context—the sand and wind, the goats and Amy's scarf at the end of *Morocco*; the noise-makers in *Dishonoured* and popping balloons in *The Devil is a Woman*; the crowds at the station at the end of *Shanghai Express* and outside the temple in *I, Claudius*; the wedding ceremony in *Scarlet Empress*; the quiet, extended scene of Lola heating an iron in *The Blue Angel* after Rath stalks out angrily vowing never to return. (In a minute or so he returns, subdued.) The point of the dissolve superimposing Lily and Captain Harvey over the crowd at the end of *Shanghai Express* seems not just that they lose themselves in it. The dissolve affirms both their disregard of the crowd and the physical fact of the crowd—it doesn't just go away. Love is not a transforming power in Sternberg's films: that's the real message of the lieutenant's harangue in *Dishonoured*. Love is its own end. ■



'Ugetsu Monogatari' (1953)

MIZOGUCHI AND MODERNISM

STRUCTURE, CULTURE, POINT OF VIEW

Robert Cohen

It is twenty-two years since Donald Richie and Joseph Anderson's first major article on Kenji Mizoguchi appeared in *SIGHT AND SOUND*; and twenty since Anderson stated: 'The Japanese cinema has been established as long as the cinema has existed anywhere. In the past thirty years or so it has been much in need of discovery.' In the light of recent structural criticism in *Screen* which claims to have found traces of modernism in the films of Ozu, there is a touch of *déjà vu*. Mizoguchi, like Ozu, made fully matured films before World War II, and both directors have been considered quite traditional by Japanese critics and by the majority of non-structural Western critics. The new evaluation of Ozu, therefore, seems to suggest one of three things: first, that the structuralists have been able to reinterpret what is meant by the traditional; or that they have been able to recast much of the cultural information we have had about Japan into a modernist mode; or that structural criticism has really found an authentic new substance in the work of Ozu. It is the contention of this essay, however, that recent criticism of the Japanese film has indeed jumped too far ahead in labelling Ozu a modernist precisely because it has not sufficiently made use of the Japanese context. In following its lead, we find ourselves back at the stage which Anderson refers to, and the Japanese film looks merely exotic once again.

For structural criticism to be consistent and to claim the attention of the wider, non-academic film community, it must make use of culturally specific information. Certain elements of any alien culture must be understood, to be able to recognise historical details and social customs, to better understand character motivation and to appreciate subtleties of imagery and language. There is really no such thing in criticism as description apart from interpretation; and like the deciphering of a dream, the critic continually shifts back and forth between the elements of the work and the mechanism which created it. It is much like the old example of a conversation between two Japanese, where yes means no and vice versa. If one does not know the convention, or the language, one cannot describe the encounter or interpret the relationship.

In looking at the point of view structure of Mizoguchi's films, this essay is an attempt to lay a foundation on which we may eventually build a more accurate picture of Japanese modernism. It is contended that Mizoguchi, along with Ozu, Gosho, Kinugasa and Yasujiro Shimazu, helped to create a cinema of classical realism closer to the Western model than to anything which has only recently been accomplished in a cinema of modernism in Europe. The classical realism of the Japanese film is indeed a system of representation in the same way that Hollywood movies are a system: they are both essentially formal tendencies rather than hard and fast rules for the definition of space and the control of causal relationships. Japanese realism, however, differs from the Western model primarily in two ways: it employs an editing system of 90 and 180 degrees utilising a 360 degree rule rather than Hollywood's 180; and the Japanese system tends to use a moving camera with the long take to photograph dialogue scenes instead of the shot/reaction shot preferred in the West. When this system is placed within the specific context of Mizoguchi's films, we will see that it functions with great economy to create spatial and temporal coherence different from but analogous to that found in Western classical realism.

In the *Screen* articles on Ozu (Vol. 17, No. 2), these characteristics of Japanese film structure are corroborated. The difficulty is not so much that the critics misunderstand the Japanese system as that they impose on it too many Western assumptions. This effort would perhaps lead directly to an understanding of Japanese modernism if it were true that in Japan the 19th century European novel had determined the use of filmic codes without having been radically altered; if Renaissance perspective had been responsible for organising a humanistic subject within the structure of discourse and graphic arts; and these structural assertions would perhaps be true if Japanese linguistic and psycho-analytical structure were uniformly responsible for developing art forms which are clearly subject-centred. These ideas have become the basis for most structural studies of film; but debatable as they are even in Western criticism, there has yet to be any analysis of these concepts in Japanese terms. Conclusions, therefore, about the nature of Japanese modernism based on these tentative assumptions are without adequate foundation.

There is also a distinction to be made between the modern and the modernistic. As a modern, post-industrial society, Japan interacts with other such societies. There is an affinity with the 20th century mental attitude of the West, and in art this interrelationship is manifest in a borrowing and adaptation of cultural forms and models. The purely modern has, thus, been influential for the Japanese. For an artist, this has been both a liberation and a liability. It has meant a degree of freedom from convention and from the restrictive use of genre, while it has meant a form of personal isolation already acute for the Japanese artist.

In literature, the so-called modern novel when specifically referred to in Japanese means the *shosetsu*. It designates an approximation of the term 'novel' in the West, but it was a literary form adopted full blown as it were rather than a phenomenon which evolved in Japan over centuries. To be sure there were precedents in various kinds of writing, but it was not until the Meiji Restoration that a truly modern international age began. There was at the turn of the last century a great hunger for European modernistic technique; but more often than not the effects of adaptation came very close to expressing classical Japanese aesthetic ideas. As Masao Miyoshi has indicated (*Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel*), the Japanese surrealists could have found what they were looking for in the *waka* and *haiku*. Kawabata and the Neo-Perceptionists could have used these forms in their attempts to modernise written Japanese. What this indicates is that, despite talk of foreign influence by the Japanese themselves, the form in which the work finally appears must be evaluated in both its intent and its effect.

A similar point can be made about Mizoguchi's films in terms of their use of Western editing techniques. Mizoguchi was one of the first in Japan to make fully realised sound films by assimilating the Western model. His system differed in the ways already mentioned, but it came about because of his understanding of European and American films. It was considered progressive for a Japanese film-maker to accept foreign influence during the silent period, and Mizoguchi was a leader with the progressives. The fact remains, however, that when sound came to Europe the continuation of classical realism with further emphasis on the relative correspondence between sound and image was generally a conservative manoeuvre. It becomes clear that, depending on context, the Western codes were either progressive or conservative depending on their function, and that they were certainly modern for the Japanese. What they accomplished, however, within the system of representation already established is another story.

The term modernism itself seems to be used more by critics who understand it least. The ubiquity of the term is confirmed when we see it applied to such diverse film-makers as Godard, Resnais, Antonioni, the Straubs and Paul Sharits. But the aspect of modernism with which we will deal involves the notion of the 'deconstruction' of classical realism. The interplay between first person shots (point of view associated with a character, but not necessarily a 'subjective shot') and the third person/authorial view is said by structuralists to be the privileged form of classical realism.

Since the narrative film dominates the Western feature industry, this alternation of points of view creates an imaginary time and space whose purpose it is to reinforce the illusion of the reality of the story. Modernist works subvert the 'natural' causality that such a form is made to imply. It is said to break the imaginary closed nature of realist illusionism in its refusal to resolve in its plastic form the enigma of its content. What is often called the 'invisibility' of realist editing ensures the contrary; that the illusion to which the film refers outside the film becomes more real to the audience than the screen images themselves. It is because the systematic portrayal of point of view is central to this concept of realism that it is used to discuss the modernism of Mizoguchi.

Since all films are forced to use some form of representation to record their images on celluloid, it is through the representative function that modernism arises. It has often been a structural dictum that while the realist film can question reality through representation, only the modernist text can question the very act of representation. *Last Year at Marienbad* is the prototype, because the juxtaposition of past and present is never resolved into one coherent imaginary whole. The expectation for precise causality is thwarted; the film therefore becomes a puzzle, and this enigma and its working out is more central and real than any imaginary referent. The danger of this conception of modernism is of course that such a host of other concerns becomes secondary that the primary theme of all modernistic works becomes the problem of representation.

Any formal element which appears not to fit within the realist system is potentially a modernistic component. These have two aspects. They can merely signify a gap in the film's design, and as Barthes has shown, these features are often key dimensions to gain us entry into the illusionism of a fictional work. The second possibility is that the element will signify a break with the realist conception, and in this case other components will be sought to verify the assertion. When a consistent structural arrangement is found that does seem to de-emphasise the causal connections between images, then we may have a case for a complete modernist film. In both cases, however, intelligibility depends on an awareness of the conventions which are being contradicted and on the analysis of the film on a proper conceptual level.

It is on the question of levels and the notion of convention that the Japanese film is most problematic. A situation exists analogous to one found in Japanese literature. The poetic tradition in Japan has been dominated for almost a thousand years by the lyric form, and elements of lyricism inform the Japanese novel in a much stronger, more direct way than was the case in Europe, where the antecedent would perhaps be the epic poem. It is possible, therefore, that in the Japanese novel the creation of atmosphere or a rather disjointed stream of thoughts and digressions will take precedence over the creation of a flesh and blood character. It is equally the case that a book with more than a minimum of emphasis on action will merely juxtapose events of secondary importance and leave out the primary action (Nagai Kafu's *Geisha in Rivalry*, for example). It is partly a consequence of knowing convention and partly

having expectations at all which gears the reader towards his own level of interest. It is also a question of finding consistency on any level which offers a work its overall intelligibility. If we, therefore, apply Western notions of narrative to Japanese films, we most likely will find appropriate gaps; but for those elements to subvert illusionism (i.e. to hint at or reflect a different world from that created on the screen), they must do so in terms of the Japanese system itself.

There is a tendency of film structuralism to isolate specific cinematic figures—the shot/reaction shot, for example—and attribute to them one particular function without considering the range of possible identities they may have for an audience. Terms like modernism and realism, therefore, are often solely derived from what Georges Poulet calls 'the exclusive interdependence of the objective elements' (*The Structuralist Controversy*, 'Criticism and the Experience of Interiority'). This objectification of form has often meant that the range of subjective responses one has in any one film are considered secondary. We know there are as many reasons for identifying with a film as there are people, and that every film offers a special case. Systematising special structures of identification, however, seems to lead to acute problems when we consider films from alien cultures.

Japanese films use forms of catharsis, as do most Western films, but in doing this they exhibit a causal structure quite different from Hollywood. They also employ a system of characterisation which produces strong protagonists but not as complete individuals; a lack of psychological depth is compensated for in the pathos of a character's actions. There is self-consciousness in Japanese art, and there are forms of self-reflexivity in literature and film. There is a precedent for the multi-view rather than perspective, and this too throws into question the idea of subjective identification.

All this is not to say that in the uniqueness of Japan we are able to see objective structures based on acceptance of a clear,

unproblematic classical realism; but that the Japanese system itself exhibits analogous tensions to those of Hollywood realism when we try to affix a label to any element, whether the reaction shot or the long take. This essay only aspires to highlight a number of areas previously taken for granted.

Point of view, besides being a series of precise visual strategies, is also a product of a certain orientation towards subject matter. The most consistent themes which we find in nearly all Mizoguchi's surviving films (thirty-two out of an estimated eighty) are those associated with women. Before 1936 and the start of his successful collaboration with the screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda, Mizoguchi made a number of films based on stories by Izumi Kyoka. These stories, written as romantic treatments of troubled domesticity, seem to be the first major source for Mizoguchi's preoccupation with women. Izumi was extremely popular, and some of Mizoguchi's adaptations were no doubt true to the spirit of the author in being over-sentimental. But a few serious literary critics recognised Izumi's perception of a number of real certainties within male/female relationships as they were perceived just after 1900. The central one was the fact that Japanese women were continually called on to sacrifice themselves and their own needs for their lovers; according to Tadao Sato, these stories usually centred on the husband's career taking precedence over the wife. An equally common Izumi situation found an older woman involved with a student, usually as lover and patroness. This is the background of two of Mizoguchi's earliest surviving films, *White Threads of the Waterfall* (1933) and *The Downfall* (1935).

This theme of woman as sacrificial lamb expanded throughout Mizoguchi's career to attack misogyny in general. Because we must begin looking at his films of the 1930s without the luxury of seeing his earlier development, it appears that he very quickly broke with Izumi's romantic mould and entered into a mode of realism. In describing *Sisters of the Gion* (1936), Richie and Anderson see that the

film poses a question of choice for the Japanese audience: the film condemns both sisters for their actions, but is more sympathetic to the traditional older sister. That it at least presents two sides of an issue separates the film from earlier notions of the romantic.

It is less important to decide whether these early films or the later ones meet all the requisites for the realist label. There are enough indications that the setting up of a thematic duality in their subject matter tends to confirm the Japanese notion of a general style of realism. A series of issues are opposed to each other, and at least part of the resolution of a Mizoguchi film is left up to the audience. For point of view in general, this means that the narrator, the author of the film, will have an equalising influence on the perspectives of the characters. Rather than have characters function in opposition, in these films we find parallelism. This is a rhetorical device found obviously in other cultures, but in Mizoguchi's films the characters are so often identified with obverse aspects of a common series of themes that they almost appear as doubles.

We find some version of the parallel in almost all the films. The varied lives of prostitutes is a particularly clear picture of the parallel as microcosm in *Women of the Night* (1948) and *Street of Shame* (1956). The most frequent parallel involves two women embodying complementary or conflicting characteristics, or one showing a later stage towards which the other is headed. Fifteen films make obvious use of this device, from the good girl devotion versus bad girl status and money parallel of *Hometown* (1930), to the older/younger geisha conflict of *Gion Festival Music* (1953); the mother/daughter structure of *Ugetsu* (1953). Parallelism is not confined to women. There is the student versus non-student form in *Song of a Hometown* (1925); the rival tenors in *Hometown* and the clan rivalries in *The 47 Ronin* (1941 and 1942); Oharu's series of lovers in *The Life of Oharu* (1952), and the contrasting patrons of the women in *Street of Shame*. This type of parallelism does not set up polar opposites; and in these contrasts, the characters usually have more in common than they have differences.

Parallelism provides that there will be at least two central character points of view. These are ideal forms of identification. There is also an element of choice, which is of course gratuitous because the audience is given only very special information. We note that these general tendencies of Mizoguchi's films are perhaps no more than tendencies. These features—the use of two strong central characters, the two points of view and the elements of gratuitous choice—can be found in films from any number of cultures. It is only when they combine in a specific way and for a specific reason that they create a unique something which we call a film by Mizoguchi; therefore, in conjunction with the above characteristics, we find another figure, that of a detached observer. In virtually every film there are characters, some important and others merely peripheral, who see the action as it unfolds; and the audience sees these characters as they watch.

The function of these observing figures is

The two sisters in 'Sisters of the Gion' (1936)



naturally determined by the film itself. Often they are in the scene from the beginning, but equally camera movement reveals them after some particularly dramatic moment, or they walk before the camera at the exit of some more central character. This adds a possible third point of view to the action, and we can often draw an analogy between these people and the audience in relation to the screen. If the audience watches a series of actions, and simultaneously sees another character in frame observing the same activity, there is a tendency to believe the truth of the action. This is also the case when either by eyeline or physical proximity an observer is implied even though not actually visible on the screen. This is most important, because in Mizoguchi's films characters have only a limited number of choices for their action. Their behaviour is conventional, and in Japan especially that means there are very few possibilities.

As already stated, Mizoguchi's visual style is characterised by the infrequent use of the one-shot, shot/reaction shot in dialogue scenes. There is a preference for the two-shot, or shots in which all the protagonists appear together in frame. If one character is framed by himself, this is followed more often by a pan or track than by a cut; or if there is a cut, then it is followed by a pan or track to more dialogue involving the same or different characters. This procedure reinforces the objectifying function of the observer, and gives most action its communal character. Action appears as a shared experience when the audience is generally given an additional view which seems to match its own.

This objectivity is itself an illusion, the Bazinian ideal, but it is a specific formal arrangement distinct from the general classical realism of the West. Even directors like Wyler, who match the long take, deep-focus model, still regularly use close-ups and first person point of view shots. Mizoguchi uses these devices, but not as regular units of his 'most typical' style. His later films often look more Western in using tighter character framing, but they still rely on the pan and track instead of cutting during dialogue. They create an overriding third person perspective like that of Hollywood, but it is accomplished by a different technique. The objective illusion is taken to more of an extreme in Mizoguchi's films precisely because of the observer. Space is defined with few first person shots and with a moving camera combined in extreme cases either with no cutting in the scenes composed with one shot (more consistent in the 40s) or with one 180 degree cut (the technique dominant in the 30s). In most films, all sides of any room in which dialogue occurs are shown either quickly through cutting when one first sees the area or later after considerable action has taken place. Scenes of the first type occur during the opening dialogue between the policeman and the madam in *Street of Shame* (a series of cuts) and in the watermelon cutting scene in the kitchen during the 1939 *Story of the Late Chrysanthemums* (one 180 degree cut). The latter definition of space is used with the sisters' home in *Sisters of the Gion* and the Western-style apartment in



Above: a modern Japanese setting in *'The Lady from Musashino'* (1951);
right: a characteristic Mizoguchi group of travellers in *'Sansho Dayu'* (1954)

Osaka Elegy (1936). The observers who look on during these scenes or who are present in these rooms at other times testify to the concreteness of the setting and help to create an objectified illusion of continuity.

Seeing all sides of any spatial area raises the question of the camera position, and in Mizoguchi's films there is a continuous series of so-called 'impossible shots'. We see areas of walls or objects positioned in the same places where the camera must also be. Sometimes this is obvious, as in the kitchen scene from *Chrysanthemums* or the shot between two mirrors in *Sisters of the Gion*. Generally, however, the impossible shot occurs as in Western films when there is a high or low angle, and we accept the fact that a directorial presence is 'naturally' in evidence. These devices create continuity for cinematic fiction when they do not call attention to themselves; and because we accept convention, we rarely notice the impossibilities. It is not quite the same for Mizoguchi, because on the way towards continuity there are usually a number of temporary spatial uncertainties. In the young woman's apartment in *Osaka Elegy*, it takes repeated viewings to put the floor plan together because there are so many scenes which take place in smaller areas. (This apartment must be one of the oddest ever created, a Japanese art deco version perhaps of something Mizoguchi saw in a European film.) Mizoguchi uses a number of devices to create intermittent spatial ambiguity (off-screen space and sound being primary); but because these are always resolved, they seem to be more classical than modern.

There is a final aspect to the general consideration of point of view. This is the use of motifs organised around moments of ritualised observation. These moments include the many uses of the theatrical experience; references to particular spatial possibilities of the *kabuki* theatre; references to performances of various kinds, from the musical recital to the duel; and the uses of *seppuku* or ritual suicide. In all these, there is a clear distinction between performing and observation, and the event itself at the centre is socially defined. It has specific dramatic functions in its varied contexts, but it also reinforces the general impetus we find in Mizoguchi's films towards objectifying the action. The performance as socially defined is generally a time of repose, in which interaction between observer and performer is abstract but direct. The reality of the performance is absolutely objective in the sense that it happens for so many people; but during these moments, the subjectivity of the events becomes more important. These moments are therefore privileged, because they both heighten and subdue all the various points of view which converge in any one Mizoguchi film.

These motifs range from the uses of the world of the theatre itself in *The Straits of Love and Hate* (1937), *Late Chrysanthemums*, *White Threads of the Waterfall* and *The Love of the Actress Sumako* (1947), to the use of theatregoing to create a particularly dramatic climax in *A Woman of Rumour*. In *Osaka Elegy*, the public nature of attending the theatre provides a dramatic turn in which being seen is as important as seeing; and in *The 47 Ronin* (both parts) the *noh* performance creates historical authenticity and

metaphoric intensity. Other moments in which observation is formalised include the final river parade in *Chrysanthemums* and the challenge sword fight in *Musashi Myamoto* (1944); the courtroom scenes in *White Threads* and *The Victory of Women* (1946); the election rally in *My Love Has Been Burning* (1949); the classroom scenes in *Song of a Hometown*, *The Poppy* (1935) and *The Lady from Musashino* (1951); and the musical performances in *Hometown*, *The Empress Yang Kwei-Fei* (1955), *Ugetsu* and *Miss Oyu* (1951). In these examples, the process of seeing and being seen produces certain individual thematic patterns and provides a number of moments when various points of view (not the least important being that of the audience) seem to merge into one.

The other prominent motif of ritualised observation is *seppuku*, and this is the most important because of its implications. This form of suicide was the favoured way of death for the samurai (second only to dying in battle) because it preserves the honour there is in paying for the death of one to whom one has been in debt, or in regaining the honour that one has lost. To accomplish *seppuku*, one follows a number of very precise steps, from assuming the proper position, to cutting open one's stomach with a particular blade, to the cutting off of the head by a second. The procedure is very slow, and it is perhaps one of the most painful ways one could die. *Seppuku* today is generally reserved for fanatics (like Yukio Mishima) and for history.

There are no graphic portrayals of the act of *seppuku* in Mizoguchi's films; nothing of the irony in a film like Kobayashi's *Harakiri*. Even though ritual suicide in its historical form appears only in *The 47 Ronin*, it has important consequences in the many other suicides in Mizoguchi's films. The common element is the observing figures. The second whose function it is to sever the head is also responsible for seeing that the suicide itself is carried out correctly. In Part II of *The 47 Ronin*, Lord Hosokawa and his men are responsible for the ceremony, and they oversee each of the deaths of Oishi and his men. They are the seconds, the observers and the upholders of the shogun's law. In Part I, however, Lord Asano's suicide is supervised by another lord, and even though Asano's men take no legal responsibility for his original act of violence, they are denied the privilege of watching the ceremony.

The scene of Asano's walk to his death is one of the most striking in either part. The camera dollies back as a retainer walks with Asano, then cranes up as Asano enters the ceremonial yard. The retainer is left outside, and the high angle shot places Asano in the interior with the retainer separated from him by the courtyard wall. The shot is held as the retainer collapses and Asano disappears at the top of the frame. (The use of off-screen space at the top and bottom of the frame is a frequent Mizoguchi device.) In this scene, the denial of observation is paradoxically tragic and at the same time a form of self-preservation. The retainer knows it is his duty both to avenge his lord's death and to kill himself in return. He is denied the privilege of seeing Asano die, but he is also spared the resultant agony. Much like the ritual of communion, *seppuku* for the observer celebrates both a triumph over one's own immediate death (one's sins are relieved by

the death of another), and one feels remorse over not having been able to spare the other's life in the first place. When the retainer is kept from being a direct observer, the pathos of his predicament is that much more intense.

There are other forms of suicide in Mizoguchi's films, and although most involve drowning, they also make use of observing figures. In *Portrait of Madame Yuki* (1950) and in *Sansho the Bailiff* (1954), women drown themselves in a lake; in the former the death is an act of weakness, while the latter is a show of strength. Madame Yuki's death shows Hama how false her illusions have been. Her final words to the dead woman are, 'You coward!' and it is fairly certain that Hama has finally come out from under the older woman's influence. In *Sansho*, the old woman says nothing after Anju sacrifices herself so that her brother can escape from Sansho's bondage. It is as much sorrow at the girl's fate as joy in her final release from the misery of slavery that the old woman must feel. In both instances there is a palpable sense of ambivalence towards death. This combination of antithetical attitudes is at the core of the *seppuku* tradition; and in both cases there is more than a little resemblance to the Freudian interpretation of the ritual of mourning.

These examples, ranging from parallel construction to the observer and then to forms of ritual, are general patterns which tend to provide in turn general contexts which determine point of view. Point of view itself, of course, has a dual nature: it includes both what characters see and how the narrator/author presents them and the action. There is a bridge, however, in Mizoguchi's films which narrows this potential distance. This is accomplished not by alternating first and third person shots, but by generally alternating (if there is any cutting at all) the third person view. Even with the implied continuity of scenes done in one shot, Mizoguchi still seeks to deny all potential discontinuity. This is a direct result of the use of recurrent motifs which involve seeing and observation.

When we discuss specific points of view, we find there are a number of shots which do correspond to a character's subjective viewpoint. In *The Downfall* (1935) and in *The Noted Sword* (1945), there are superimpositions which reflect character subjectivity, but these are not rendered through the eyes of the character in the form which shows us exactly what he or she sees. These scenes include both the characters and what they see within the same shot. Only in *The Life of Oharu* is there a precise subjective superimposition, when Oharu sees her former lover's face in place of a Buddhist statue. In a film like *Oyuki, the Virgin* (1935), there is crosscutting of first person shots in a dialogue, but they only occur once in a scene of particularly charged emotion. The same is true in *Yang Kwei-Fei*, but it is generally used only for effect. It is present in the coach scene in the opening flashback of *White Threads*, but the rest of the film eschews its use. There is another formal pattern, however, which seems problematic, and is the closest example which on the surface may suggest a modernist label. In *White Threads*, *The Downfall*, *Sisters of the Gion* and *Ugetsu*, there are specific shots which are first presented as subjective, first person character

views, but which eventually include within the shot (by camera movement) the characters whose view we have ostensibly been given.

This apparent mixing of points of view defies the clarity and obviousness of Western realism because it blurs the distinction between first and third person perspectives. As we have said, the interplay between these viewpoints has been considered the privileged structural feature of the classical model. With this type of device, one shot includes both a third and a first person view. In realist films (as defined by structuralists), a first person shot can approximate a third person shot and vice versa; but one can not be graphically shown to be simultaneously both. There can be overlapping, but it must be accomplished by implication. We also often find in realism a cut from a first or third person point of view to a similar shot closer to the action. Even when we see that the relationship between characters is unchanged, we accept the cut as an element of a director's personal style, or as some formal way of intensifying the action. In either case, there is usually no contradiction posed in terms of the individual shot. The one-shot contradiction must, therefore, either be considered a mistake or one must search for its function in thematic or generic terms.

In considering specific structural arrangements in Mizoguchi's pre-war films, one must be specially careful because of the fact that others have re-edited some of these features, and 'complete' versions of some prints circulated in the West only remain in a single Japanese copy. (The suicide of the heroine in *White Threads* exists only in one print held in Kyoto.) There is the additional possibility that some sequences were put together rather arbitrarily, as the seemingly illogical editing of the long bridge scene in *White Threads*. Yoshikata Yoda's explanation for this scene is that its apparent monotony forced Mizoguchi to change camera positions as a concession to the viewer. Be that as it may, there is still in the early films a general consistency in creating unambiguous spatial relationships; and Yoda's explanation remains merely a warning to those over-zealous for great paradoxes. The opening sequence of *The Downfall* at the stormy railway station is meticulous in placing the major characters on the platform in an unambiguous relationship to each other. They are directly linked by camera movement and eyeline matching. The contradictory shot appears in the first flashback sequence as does the same device in *White Threads*, and, therefore, the contrast is striking. There are other matching problems in *The Downfall*, however, and because of the film's age, it is difficult to find a function for these devices which is not in some sense still unclear.

In *White Threads*, the heroine in her flashback sees herself in the coach which is being driven by the young man who has subsequently become her lover. There is a medium shot of the woman, Taki, as she sits motionless inside the coach and gazes forward and down to screen left. There is a cut which because of her glance implies that the next shot will be her point of view. The shot is a tight medium shot of the driver as he bends over to fix the wheel. The camera tilts up and we see Taki in the background looking forward at him. The sequence in *The Downfall* is much the same. In the flashback



The ritual of suicide in 'The 47 Ronin'

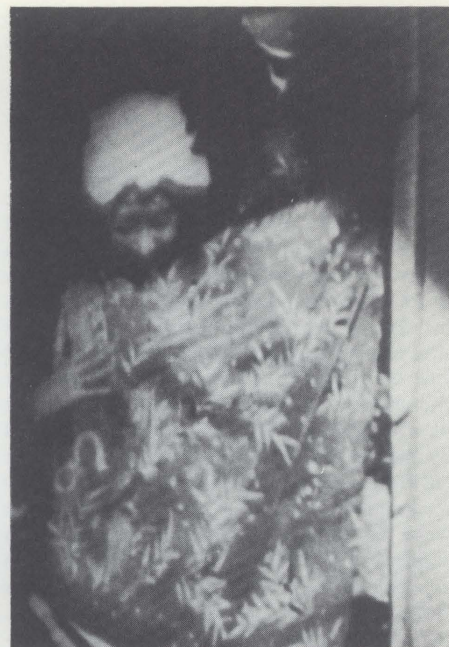
the heroine, Osen, is shown in a tight medium shot at night in the yard of a shrine. She is looking for the hero, Sokichi, and she looks down and to screen left. She squats and her gaze is directed back into the frame and to the left. There is a cut to a close-up of Sokichi's sandals, and the camera tilts up to reveal Osen squatting in the background.

Because both these examples occur in flashback when subjectivity is crucial, there is some truth to the assertion that this contradictory device is a 'structural principle . . . of the fantastic genre' (Mark Nash, *Screen*, Vol. 17, No. 3). There is further evidence of this in its use in *Ugetsu*; but Nash concludes his study of Dreyer's *Vampyr* with the following: 'The fantastic text is not modernist in the sense of say Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle* . . . but it is progressive in that in it the category of the real is at least under scrutiny.' In this context, reality refers to two things: the first is the expectation for classical continuity in which first and third person views are intercut but remain separate. The interruption of this convention by a director as conscious of form as Dreyer indicates some kind of explicit interpretation; structure will become a direct indicator of meaning. Secondly, reality is the knowledge of fantastic genres, either of other vampire movies or of extra-filmic elements such as the fantastic archetypes in literature or the science and folklore of vampires themselves. In the specific mode of the fantastic (as defined by Tzvetan Todorov), the reality of a central action cannot be determined by any one explanation; and therefore a formal point of view device which does not clearly indicate whose perspective is shown does produce an unresolvable dilemma. It is of course possible that when Mizoguchi includes these sequences within flashbacks, he is negating completely the point of view question. Still in *The Downfall* the lead-in shot to one flashback is from one character, and the return shot focuses on the other. There is an indication that this is therefore a shared flashback, and once again ambiguity enters. This is even intensified when action occurs in Sokichi's

flashback which he could not have known.

It is ridiculous to call any of Mizoguchi's films discussed so far fantastic. To be more than arbitrary, the label must take note of a significant number of other features. Nash and others have no doubt isolated crucial patterns of editing and camera movement which have great influence over determining the relationship between style and content. The structuralist label for any element, however, does not mean that the feature cannot be found in other contexts and with additional functions. In Nash's analysis of *Vampyr*, the indeterminate viewpoint (or rather the confusion of a consistent view) near the opening of the film (in which an apparent point of view shot from Gray of the weathervane then reveals Gray in the shot) becomes primary only after it relates to other points of view later on. The fantastic label for the film is possible only after this connection. Likewise, the same problem in *The Downfall* and *White Threads* can only be put into perspective after it is given its proper place within the entire film. When these comparisons are made, we find ourselves not simply with an empirical method of analysis, but within the more speculative process of interpretation. A procedure is what it is only because it does what it does. Being conservative at this point, we can say that Mizoguchi was very conscious of the need for a consistent point of view, and he knew the means which were available to manipulate it.

When Nash brings in information outside the film itself to explain the film's formal arrangement, he is explaining how certain themes are worked out in terms of structure. The crucial point of view which is made ambiguous calls attention to itself as a theme. Since we know from fantastic literature that seeing is a central problem, the obfuscation of point of view fits well into showing how *Vampyr* works as a fantastic work. The fact that seeing is the key to the believability of the fantastic means that the act of representing what one sees, or what the director wishes the audience to see, becomes integral to the film and to the genre. It could be argued that the



fantastic is the only genre (if that is what it is) which has the same general preoccupation as the larger question of modernism itself. This is one of the reasons Nash does not call *Vampyr* a modernist work. It is possible, therefore, that certain of Mizoguchi's films also make use of the themes of seeing but only for specific effect. This is indicated by the overall point of view structure we have already discussed in terms of the observer and ritualised observation.

One sequence in *Ugetsu* is a particularly clear example of Mizoguchi's control over point of view, and it illustrates the viability of considering this device as an economic means of creating significant themes. The film divides in half rather neatly with the first part dealing with the potter and his wife, Miyagi; the second shows his infatuation and subsequent terror in his confrontation with the ghost, Wakasa. The scene of a contradictory point of view occurs conveniently between the two halves. If we accept this division, we note that in all the scenes in each half between the potter, Genjuro, and both women, spatial continuity is maintained, and the reality of the women in each of their domains is created with conventional imagery. Miyagi is associated of course with the home, family and security. Even the lake scene in the first part, while ghostly because of being dark and unpredictable, is still a metaphor of foreboding within the story. There is talk of spirits and supernatural danger, but there are no formal devices which key us to the fact that anything will occur which is perhaps beyond imagination. Lady Wakasa also appears at first without fanfare, and her non-human form is only hinted at by use of shadows and imagery associated with neglect and decay. The entire second half in fact can be explained as either pole which circumscribes the fantastic (either the 'marvellous' or the 'uncanny'), but there are no internal structural elements which undercut the fact that the actions could have happened if only in Genjuro's mind.

After the initial impersonal exchange at the market-place between Genjuro and Lady Wakasa, the potter ventures for the first time in search of the woman. Immediately preceding their reunion, and before the three (Genjuro, Wakasa and the old nurse)

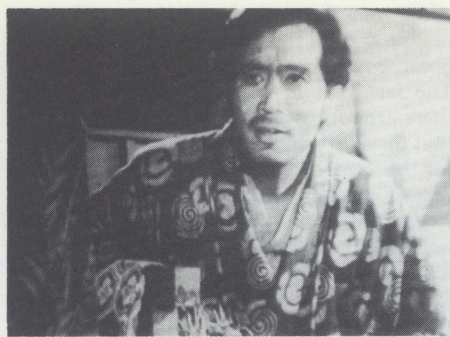


approach the family mansion, Genjuro stops at a kimono shop. In the first shot the camera is at the back of the shop, and Genjuro is seen in a long shot as he walks forward toward the camera and the proprietor, who is seated on screen left. The potter looks up and forward at the hanging kimono material, and the camera cuts 180 degrees to Genjuro's point of view. The camera pans from right to left, but we see neither the shop owner nor the material previously seen at the front of the store. There is a cut to a two-shot of the owner and Genjuro, the camera again at the back of the shop. Cut to a medium close-up of Genjuro, then to a medium shot of kimonos from his point of view; cut back to a one-shot of the potter; then as he looks forward at kimonos, harp music begins and there is another cut back to his p.o.v. From the left background enters Miyagi carrying a tray of pottery. She stops and looks at the material, puts down the tray, and walks forward to admire the kimonos. She glances at the camera, and then a dolly out reveals Genjuro in the shot as he stares at his wife with his back to the camera. As she recedes out of sight, there is a cut to a medium shot of Genjuro entranced; he shakes his head as if he cannot believe what he has seen. He hears



a voice calling him; he looks off-screen right; cut to a full shot of Wakasa and the nurse.

The point of view contradiction of this scene (the potter brought into his own subjectivity) is marked off by several keys. We are led into it by the first subjective shot which does not include the proprietor, and by the harp music which seems to match Genjuro's evident reverie just before he sees Miyagi. His wife disappears from the frame as if she were only going to reappear any moment trying on another kimono. When there is a cut back to the last reaction shot of the potter, he blinks as if he also is not sure whether she will return or not. He hears a voice off-screen, and for a moment he is further confused. The potter looks screen right, and the cut to Wakasa and the nurse reinforces the 'realistic' associations attached to a reaction shot motivated by the preceding directional glance. The two figures that Genjuro sees are, therefore, more real in this sequence than Miyagi even though we know (or will realise shortly) that they are apparitions. By following this editing pattern, we see how subtly and carefully the points of view are creating a crisis within the potter's



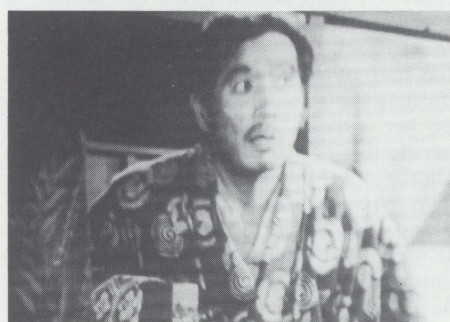
The kimono shop sequence in 'Ugetsu'. Left: Genjuro arrives at the shop; his wife appears in the doorway, looks at the material, turns towards the camera. Above: the key shot, with Genjuro and Miyagi both in frame. Right: reaction shots of Genjuro; he looks off right and sees Lady Wakasa and the nurse. Stills photographed off the screen by Mike Wessen at the NFT

perception and at the same time within the viewer's.

This sequence is so carefully detailed that the dolly back to include Genjuro is merely one signpost in calling attention to the precarious nature of Genjuro's perception of his exploits. The point of view of the film, therefore, revolves around Genjuro. Lady Wakasa is never shown apart from him, and thus exists only for him. Miyagi on the other hand is shown in her death, and the entire Tobei/Ohama relationship is also shown apart from Genjuro (another parallel). In this way, the realness of the people in the potter's family (Tobei is Genjuro's brother) is affirmed over Wakasa's dependence for her existence on Genjuro being with her. In one scene the apparent reality of Wakasa is emphasised when we see her rise while Genjuro is still asleep. This is a third person viewpoint, and it makes Wakasa seem to exist apart from Genjuro's observation. Mizoguchi avoids in the second half of the film the direct trickery of the distorted first person shot; and therefore, when we hear that Wakasa is a ghost, we are somewhat less prepared for the shock. The mysterious mansion with its torn paper walls on the outside and its mended interior causes a sense of foreboding, but only the voice of the old patriarch really denotes the supernatural. Even the *noh* inspired architecture (the exterior-like stage with the surrounding pine trees) only reinforces the antique quality of the scenes in the mansion. It does not specifically challenge the reality of the episode.

There are actually no ways of explaining the contradictory point of view shot; it does combine a first person view with a third. There are, however, within the context of the film, many explanations for the sequence in terms of seeing and perception. *Ugetsu* was taken from two stories of the supernatural by Akinari Ueda, and we can quite legitimately talk of certain fantastic impulses within the work. In using the point of view device Mizoguchi is totally aware of what he is doing; but the film as a whole does not remain an enigma, nor is there a real crisis in its overall formal design.

The modernist notions we have been using would require that the entire film be recast in the mould of its enigma. The contradiction of *Ugetsu*, however, is reinforced only on a thematic level and not by further formal arrangements of the contradiction. It is used



for an effect—to throw into obscurity the authenticity of Genjuro's view—but it does not force us to re-evaluate all Genjuro's relationships. His sojourn with Wakasa can even be considered a dream, but it does not negate either the fact of Miyagi or the entire enterprise of his life. The contradictory points of view occurring in one shot can indeed be the 'structural principle of the fantastic', but it is also a device which can be used in other contexts to undercut character believability. Because it subverts our expectations for absolute causality, it shares a modernist pale, but it is not inexorably modernistic.

The closeness between *Ugetsu* and fantastic stories is primarily due to Mizoguchi's handling of Ueda's original tales. While this genre is particularly close to the problems of seeing and memory, there are other examples in Mizoguchi's films where a similar form suggests analogous crises. One of the opening sequences of *The Portrait of Madame Yuki* is perhaps the most audacious use of the obfuscation of time and space within a quite conventional modern Japanese melodrama. The fact that *Madame Yuki* preceded *Ugetsu* shows also how Mizoguchi was perhaps working toward the perfection of the later film. Both share common elements, the largest being the disillusionment of both central characters, and the difficulty portrayed of reconciling past and present.

After her initial arrival at Madame Yuki's home in Atami, the young girl, Hama, is framed in a tight medium shot as she takes a bath. She gazes screen right, and the camera pans in this direction, taking her out of frame and settling on a close-up of water overflow-



ing the side of the tub. (Water imagery abounds in Mizoguchi, particularly associated with sexuality in *Madame Yuki* and in *Ugetsu*.) Hama's voice-over begins recounting her earliest memories of what she has been told about Madame Yuki, and there is a cut to a panning shot from left to right. We see a Japanese room with curtains, an open *shoji*, a small table before the *tokanoma* (an inset portion of the traditional room where flower arrangements and calligraphy are displayed), and there is a lap dissolve to another panning shot in the same direction. This is another room with trees visible outside, and as the narration continues we see a woman's dressing area. The pan stops on a mirror in long shot with the words, 'that face', and a male voice interrupts saying that this is Yuki's room. There is a cut, and Hama and the boy Seitaro are shown seated in the room from which the pan has just come.

The voice-over in this sequence, which marks temporal continuity, is contradicted by having the narration interrupted and then showing Hama in a different place and with an obvious time lapse from when it began. Not only is this interval unaccounted for, but the two pans in Yuki's rooms are of unknown areas until we are later told what they are. The ambiguity is of course heightened by the contrast of Mizoguchi's maintaining the left to right movement originally motivated by Hama's look. He is playing on spatial and temporal conventions to posit a crisis in Hama's point of view. Through the rest of the action, Hama is the primary observer of Yuki's weaknesses and her desire for suicide; and Hama is continually confronted with the falsity of her first romantic ideals. This

particular device, therefore, posits the contradiction in a way that is specifically thematic. Hama's voice-over describes what she has been told in the past, while the images we see can be either past, present or future.

These brief words of explanation do not explain away this device, and it remains an explicit contradiction in the structure of the film. It is there for a purpose, however, and like the potter's return home in *Ugetsu*, where the house is first empty and then Miyagi appears by a fire, it is here a type of trick for producing an effect. It has the immediate function of opening up the film for a variety of readings. It brings forward Hama's subjectivity to a prominent position, and intimates that her point of view will be central. As with *Ugetsu*, the contradictory device is modern, but it does not throw into question perception or reality. Hama comes to grips with her ruined expectations, and because she is so compassionate over Yuki's senseless suicide, she is a strong progressive character.

The last example of a contradictory point of view occurs in *Sisters of the Gion*. Near the beginning of the film, the bankrupt merchant, Furusawa, visits his mistress, the older sister, Umekichi. As she hustles him on his way to the bath, Omocha, the younger sister, watches the couple while brushing her teeth. There is a one-shot, medium shot of her looking toward screen right which is followed by a cut to Umekichi and Furusawa by the doorway. In this shot, the camera is placed where Omocha stands, and we are therefore in a position to see her point of view. As Furusawa leaves, the camera pans right with Umekichi as she re-enters the outer room and frames her as she meets Omocha there; the younger girl has changed positions unbeknownst to the viewer.

In this example and in *Madame Yuki*, the movement of the characters reveals a temporal ellipsis. The extreme continuity of the action in *Sisters*, however, seems to make this ambiguity almost nebulous. In *Madame Yuki*, as we have seen, it is an aural device primarily which is responsible for the contradiction. The device is not one which obscures the relationship between characters, but only the relation between the narrator and the characters. Because this occurs in Mizoguchi's films in a variety of contexts, it is not a device we can associate specifically with any one genre over another. It occurs in *Sisters* in the historical present, in *The Downfall* and *White Threads* in flashback, in *Madame Yuki* as a bridge between present and future and in *Ugetsu* as a moment of fantasy within what seems to be the present. There is thus a decided link between point of view and time; and this distinction is the most general mark of a narrator's imprint on any fictional work.

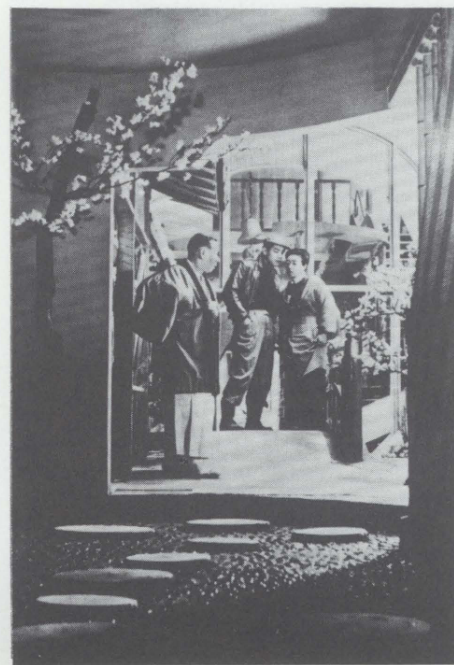
In Mizoguchi's use of the contradictory point of view, we can see illusion being undercut—the illusion of an absolute separation between narrator and character point of view. In the West, first and third person shots often overlap, but they do not as a rule appear openly contradictory. In Japan, however, the fictional narrator is built into most modern works by a process of self-effacement. This is only secondarily a result of modern convention and the illusionism of classical realism. Its centre expresses the closeness in Japan between the subject and object. Every

allusion to the subject whether as subject of discourse or of the text or of speech is suspect because it asserts the independence of the self. The fact that in both Japan and the West there are forms of illusionism does not mean that they were created by the same means and for the same reasons. In Western realism, the nature of the configuration, *post hoc ergo propter hoc* does as much to affirm the individual as it does to mask a guiding intelligence. The same is perhaps true in Japan, except that the Japanese have continually tried to break down this distinction between subject and object, self and other, while the West has attempted to conceal it. Neither enterprise has been successful, and the points at which both intersect are those filled with the most ambiguity.

What has seemed like an obvious incompatibility in these contradictory point of view structures seems actually in the Japanese context to suggest a negation of difference. These formal relationships are much like the simple first person shots which if held for a considerable time begin to appear like objective, third person views. In *The Life of Oharu*, fully three-quarters of the film occurs in flashback from Oharu's point of view; at the end of her recollection, however, the opening shots are repeated. Oharu's rendition of her past is thus objectified, and her perspective is made to correspond with the author's in a manner which is conspicuous. This circularity is true in a sense to the original (Saikaku's *The Life of an Amorous Woman*), in that it too is told by a narrator but through the woman's own words. Once he disappears, he never returns, and her comments merge with his in an implied agreement. We ultimately cannot tell who is telling the story, and this is also true of Mizoguchi's film.

It is true that the contradictory point of view occurs infrequently if we can only find five instances in thirty-two films. It is, therefore, quite narrow to suppose that in uncovering some common ground between the films in which the devices occur, we have 'explained' Mizoguchi. It is also true, however, that a film which blurs a consistent

'Street of Shame': Mizoguchi's last film, made in 1956



point of view can be modernist in one context and classical in another. This possibility is certainly a problem in Japanese literature, when the 20th century novel often has more in common with the *nouveau roman* than with Hemingway or George Eliot. Does this mean that Japanese writers have assimilated the 19th century novel to such an extent that they can reject it by creating new evolutionary forms? Or is there something within the Japanese understanding of the novel in general which allows them to create something new but based on their own theories of aesthetics? Is this modernism or neo-classicism?

In Japan it is most likely that critics will not notice these contradictions in Mizoguchi, or if they do, they are not very concerned with them. This does not mean that film-makers themselves are unaware of them, or that the more modest, audience-pleasing directors will not carefully avoid contradictions and potential ambiguity. Still, there is some phenomenon in Japanese culture that makes both these observations true; and it seems important to understand what this is so that we can discuss point of view with some kind of authority.

Part of the solution lies in Mizoguchi's iconoclasm. It is reported how he argued with Shochiku that in the interest of realism he would be obliged actually to kill the actors in *The 47 Ronin*. His persuasion was in part responsible for his using a recent *kabuki* version of the story in which there were none of the usual expansive action sequences. Of course many of his films were among the most popular of their day, but a number were evidently hard for audiences to follow. He is now considered an 'art' director, and this means in Japan approximately what it does in the West.

The greater part of explaining Mizoguchi's use of contradiction is perhaps better seen as expressing the conciliatory function of the Japanese artist. Whether this is looked on as a reconciliation between nature and culture or some other such abstraction, it does denote a particular mediating function of artists in Japan. (The distinction between serious and popular is often meaningless for the creator of Japanese fiction.) Similarly, in most of Mizoguchi's films, there are characters who function as go-betweens within the stories. They either mediate between other characters or manipulate the action by themselves. This figure has a real counterpart in Japanese society (formalised in arranged marriages or informal industrial mediation) and it is a permanent fixture of consensus democracy. It is therefore possible to see Mizoguchi's presence as narrator marked into a few of his films by the contradictory device. He organises film continuity in a way which is similar to the manner in which his characters attempt to manipulate their realities.

This analogy is different from a non-Japanese equivalent because of the emphasis placed in Japan on formalism. This leads to further speculation that only by calling attention to form can art in Japan really be separated from life. If Mizoguchi did perceive point of view to be the essential construction of film, then his making it into a contradiction is a form of his self-consciousness. It makes his films more real than reality by seeming less autonomous and less illusory; however, the myth of no illusion can be just as binding as the myth of total illusion. ■

farm horse'. As far as I know, no one has so far accused *The Fuse* of distorting the image of those collective farm pigs.

One of the favourite modes of *The Fuse* could be described as 'demagogy turned inside out'. A certain bureaucrat, unaware that he is being filmed by *The Fuse*, is preening himself in front of a newsreel camera, uttering such hackneyed demagogic phrases as 'We display continuing care for people' and 'We display continuing care for nature.' His face and the pathetic words he uttered will be reproduced on the cinema screen; but say that at the same time the viewer sees how forest trees are hacked down, or how sewage waste pollutes rivers. . . One issue of *The Fuse* told of the plight of the Eskimos who herd reindeer in the tundra and far north. They live cut off from civilisation; they don't have enough food or clothing. But the bureaucrat responsible, smiling into the camera lens, declares, 'We display continuing care for reindeer breeding.'

Sometimes the provocative techniques of *The Fuse* remind one of episodes in *Candid Camera*. For instance: *The Fuse* reporters took a completely new television set from the manufacturer and asked that one small part, worth not more than 20 kopeks, should be removed. Then they visited dozens of Moscow television repair shops and everywhere they were quoted different prices for the repair, sometimes exceeding the actual cost by fifty and even a hundred per cent. Remember that there are fixed prices in the U.S.S.R., and the repair should cost the same everywhere.

It is understood, of course, that *The Fuse's* criticism is directed against 'certain individual shortcomings', otherwise it would have no place in an official Soviet film. But as every viewer knows that these so-called 'individual shortcomings' are met at every step, he can draw his own conclusions. For some, such criticisms may truly defuse their indignation; but with others it works the other way.

My own collaboration with *The Fuse* began with the fact that *The Fuse* stole from me. Visiting a cinema one day, I saw in *The Fuse* a story based on an article of mine published in the *Economic Gazette*, which had been used without my knowledge. My story was about the shortage of babies' dummies, in spite of the fact that the production statistics showed 21 each year for each newborn member of the population. More than sufficient, it would seem. But the babies didn't have the dummies, they were being used by adults. They could be seen in every office, being used as stoppers on bottles of gum. As it is practically impossible in the Soviet Union to obtain lids to cover domestic preserving jars, rubber dummies are used instead. And so on. All this and more that had appeared in my article, I now saw on the screen.

I went to the office for the Protection of Authors' Rights at the Union of Soviet Writers and asked whether *The Fuse* had any right to turn my article into a film without my knowledge. 'As it happens,' the woman said, 'Mikhailov is right here. Why not ask him?' Mikhailov said that if I took the matter to court, I would no doubt win. But wouldn't it be better to settle it peaceably? Why didn't I write a script for *The Fuse*, based on my stories in *Izvestia*, *Krokodil*, etc.?

Mikhailov is well known as an author of children's verses, which in the 30s he didn't

write so badly but which he now writes worse and worse. He is also one of the 'literary generals' heading the Soviet Union of Writers.* Now he's known for being the editor of *The Fuse*, which, though the film is made by other hands, helps him to acquire 'moral capital'. At the same time, *The Fuse* also makes him enemies among the high-ranking bureaucrats whose departments it criticises. This caused Mikhailov so much trouble that at one time he even thought of leaving *The Fuse*. He was prevented from doing so by the opinion of fellow members of the editorial board: no one would believe that he left of his own accord, all would conclude that he had been removed. . . In a word, despite all the problems, Mikhailov needed *The Fuse*. And, strange as it may seem, *The Fuse* needed Mikhailov. The top Soviet hierarchy considers him 'their man', and what is permissible to him would hardly be permitted to anyone else. And it is a fact that bureaucrats are afraid to get caught in *The Fuse*.

Let me tell of another case I was involved in. I wrote a script and took part in shooting a documentary about the rapacious felling of the mountain forests of the Caucasus, and the consequent upsetting of the balance of nature which results in landslides, the drying up of rivers, the destruction of animals in the forest reservations. We filmed this subject for about a month. We brought back kilometres of film—kilometres of cinema accusations, of which only about 120 metres were finally used, approximately four minutes. But in practice I had learned how capacious is cinema time. In those four minutes we could speak about the significance of forests in the chain of nature; we could show the irreplaceable beauty of the Caucasus; and how in a land in which 'man does not expect favours of nature', nature awaited the favours of man. At the end of the story we showed how the felled trees raised themselves up again, as though being resurrected after death. We explained that this was only a film trick, and that it would take many years for such trees to grow again.

When the subject was ready, we asked the Ministry of Forestry to do a commentary for the film. The Minister refused, but when I answered that in that case we would explain on the screen that he had refused to provide a commentary, he sent his Deputy along instead. The Deputy came to the editorial HQ at Mosfilm Studios, looked at what we had filmed and delivered some insignificant phrases, which nevertheless we included in the film.

Next day, the Minister had reconsidered and said that it was nothing to do with him, that the felling of trees was the responsibility of another Deputy Minister, who was away on a mission, and that in general all the material filmed was a slander on Soviet timber fellers. This was followed by a letter of complaint to the Central Committee of the CPSU, which was sent on to *The Fuse* and to which I had to write a reply. Everyone knew the substance of it: the State needed wood, and for the sake of the plans to get wood even the State-protected forests were cut down. But the finished subject was still not allowed on the screen. It awaited the Party Congress, at which the party bosses of Stavropolsky

District, where we had filmed the story, would be present. During an interval of the Congress, Mikhailov brought the District Committee Secretary to our HQ, where they wine and dined him and showed him the film. He liked it. It turned out that the Stavropolsky District chiefs had come out against their Republican Ministries. And in the abyss between these two cliffs my story fell. . .

In America much is written about 'bussing'. In the Soviet Union they have no such problem. Because, in general, there are no school buses. The Government has issued a decree in which it obliges local officials to organise children's transport to village schools. But this remains just a decree, and the children continue to walk to school. I wrote a scenario about these kids, and we went to film them in one of the towns near Rostov. Here again, as so many times before, we came across the typical phenomenon of 'socialist actuality'—it was quite impossible to establish who was guilty.

The Chairman of a collective farm where fifteen of the children lived said: 'And why should I give these children transport? Out of these fifteen only five have parents who work on the farm. The rest work in factories, in a lorry depot, in provision depots. Let them transport them. . . ' The factory director said: 'Only three come from here. Let the children be transported by the collective farm or by the lorry depot. . . ' And while these bureaucrats were giving interviews, the children went on walking to school.

We filmed them walking in downpours of rain. The cameraman filmed close-ups of children's feet, sinking in mud. . . one little girl slipped and fell. We filmed them walking Indian file, when they literally were almost blown off their feet by the powerful winds of these steppe lands. . . but the adult bureaucrats at the same time go on passing the buck to one another: 'Why should I transport them? Let the others.' I have been in the auditorium when they screened the issue of *The Fuse* with this subject, and I remember the indignant reactions of the audience.

Several months after the screenings of this issue, the editorial board of *The Fuse* heard from the District Executive Committee that 'measures had been taken' and that the children now had transport. Knowing the morality of many bureaucrats, who declare that shortcomings have been put right when everything remains as it was, I sent a letter to the children to make sure. The children replied that they still walked to school, just as before. So we travelled to that place a second time. We showed the same children walking to the same school along the same road. . . Only this time, instead of rain, there is a snowstorm. At the end of the film a grandmother, a Tatar woman, says in broken Russian: 'They are deceiving. They say the autobuses are running. They are not running. . . ' That subject got on to the screens after I left the Soviet Union. It's possible that it was not cut out because of financial reasons: 2,500 copies of this *Fuse* had been printed, and to cut them in order to take out one subject would have meant a heavy loss, and upset the whole production chart.

But I am thinking now of something else. I'm thinking that those same kids are still walking to school, and I can't go to them from America, to try to help them. ■

* He is also co-author of both versions of the Soviet National Anthem.—H.M.

Film Reviews

1900

It was probably a losing bet from the outset. On the part of the financiers, that they would get their money's worth of European culture (and sexy to boot, coming from the director of *Last Tango*); on the part of the film's makers, that they would be able to incorporate Hollywood production values into a film that would nevertheless remain personal and, furthermore, political; and on the part of the producer, that he wouldn't just get stranded in the middle.

Nearly two years since the first release of the European versions, the Anglo-Saxon version of *1900* (Fox) has now arrived in Britain: a mere four hours and a bit in length, spoken in English (of a kind), and resolutely novelistic-melodramatic throughout. It is the story of *The Leopard* repeated on an even larger scale, with the difference that whereas Visconti washed his hands of what Fox did to his production, Bertolucci has supervised his own compromises and tried to make the English-language *1900* a film in its own right, and not just a watered down version of an Italian original. In a sense, of course, the English version *is* the original. Given the initial choice of English- or French-speaking actors for most of the main roles, a post-synchronisation into English would give more actorial authenticity than one into Italian. And the fact that the English version is shorter (by over an hour) than the Italian and French versions is no necessary drawback or proof of external interference: film-makers, after all, have a right to tighten up their own editing. The problem—and the evidence of real, if unintended, compromise—comes when one examines the actual effects of both the cuts and the new soundtrack.

First the sound. We may begin with what looks like a single, simple error of judgment: the dubbing of the peasant voices not into an equivalent American speech but into some sort of Italo-American whose connotations could not be more opposed to those demanded by the film. It is, as I say, a detail, though a jarring one, but it does also encapsulate the nature of the compromises to which *1900* has made itself subject. Italian films are notoriously indifferent to language, which is regarded as a neutral vehicle, and to the soundtrack in general, which is regularly post-synchronised. Post-synchronisation facilitates location shooting and also permits the use of American actors and the hope of an entry to the American market first exploited (with limited success) by Fellini and Rossellini in the early 50s. It thus promises a freedom of choice to film-makers which is in fact a snare, since what works on the home market (where all films are subjected to the same dubbed flatness) does not work abroad where connotative systems come into play over which the film-maker has no control.

The connotative system on to which *1900* is projected is that of Hollywood, where accent is used as a token connotator for certain basic stereotypical oppositions—west/east, WASP/ethnic minority, etc. For a British audience, brought up midway between Hollywood convention and the more 'realistic' native models, the meanings produced by the *1900* soundtrack are even more contradictory and hard to decipher. That Dominique Sanda as the fey, cosmopolitan Ada should speak with a slight French accent is passable; but the gap between Sterling Hayden (as

the peasant overseer), being resolutely himself, and his supposed family, being God-knows-what in the dubbing studio, is unbridgeable. And as for those voices being the voices of peasant revolution, never.

Now it can be argued that the sort of realism audiences expect, and in whose terms they read films, is of no concern to the film-maker, whose intention was not to produce a realist work in that way. And certainly *1900* is not a realist movie, either in the sense of creating a naturalistic surface-effect—being too stylised for that—or in the sense of aspiring to historical truth beneath the stylisation. (Which is perhaps only to say that—fortunately—it is no *Days of Hope* Italian-style.) But even allowing this, the question still arises what sort of movie it is, with all those actors and all those extras and its peculiar mixture of typicality and eccentricity. At heart *1900* is elegiac, and what it inscribes on its large historical canvas is a lament, in which something akin to a mourning for a lost wholeness plays a dominant role. Consider the temporal unfolding of the film: a world of childhood and unquestioned patriarchy; its interruption by war, class struggle and fascism; and a liberation which is a false dawn. Or the basic dualistic structure: two grandfathers and their two grandchildren (and for one of these grandchildren two 'fathers'), two heroines, two social classes (landowners and peasantry) and two social forces (socialism and fascism)—with the duality becoming more antagonistic as the film proceeds. At the beginning there is harmony; in the centre, conflict; and at the end, uncertainty. If the theme of a 'golden age' is traditional to pastoral, the use alongside it of an explicit mechanism of splitting adds an unexpected psychoanalytic dimension.

Dominique Sanda in '1900'



The splitting is of a type encountered elsewhere in Bertolucci's films: the choices confronting the young landowner Alfredo (Robert De Niro), between decadence, submissive conformism and resistance, are very much the same as those between which the young hero of *Before the Revolution* has to decide, while the notion of a hero split into two characters is familiar from *Partner*. The crossing of the pastoral motif with that of the split character is one of the film's most interesting features, and also the most disturbing, since the formal movement towards a 'progressive' resolution is regularly and insistently matched by movements of return. These returns crop up with varying degrees of explicitness and formal efficacy; some are contained within the structure, others are not. But they all tend to contaminate each other, with the result that the film remains in some way or other always bounded by a perspective which cannot cope with the present because everything it shows is a re-projection, however indirect, of the past, whether socio-historical or psychic and individual.

In spite of this tendency towards regression (and in spite of uncertainties and compromises of which the dubbing can stand as a symbol), *1900* is not without its splendours. Above all it has a power to surprise, to show the expected event in an unexpected light. In this sense its eccentricity, and the incorporation of this eccentricity into the staid format of the historical spectacular, proves to be its redemption.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

The Last Wave

It is apt that Peter Weir should have become the most prominent of the New Australian directors: his films—lush, beckoning fantasies, promising exotic vistas from strange new lands—have a seductiveness befitting an emergent cinema. Unfortunately, Weir's deftness with 'atmosphere' seems to have been developing at the expense of any narrative or thematic sense. The tantalising promise of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was that the lush, repressed romanticism of its Victorian girls' school setting might have become its subject—implying that it was the secretiveness and fearfulness of this culture that had generated the unsolved mystery of the plot. But unwilling or

unable to make more of this, Weir used his lyricism largely to fill in holes in the story: creating minor mysteries about incidental characters and generally wrapping events in mystical cotton wool. Such, more or less, is what has also happened to *The Last Wave* (United Artists), an even more fantastical fable which, for most of its running time, is pregnant with all sorts of spiritual menace, before winding up with a disappointingly literal (and graphically, rather poorly effected) holocaust warning.

It is a film of disparate elements, which take a long time to slide into focus. The first half hour or so is the kind of allusive, foreboding scene-setting which is Weir's speciality: in a desert township, a sudden rainstorm and then huge chunks of ice come crashing out of a cloudless sky; in Sydney, freak weather conditions make the rush-hour traffic even more trying for lawyer David Burton (Richard Chamberlain); and at home, an idyllically composed tableau of David with his wife Annie (Olivia Hamnett) and two daughters just begs to be disrupted by the bath water which comes dribbling and then flooding downstairs, having mysteriously generated itself. David begins to suffer from recurrent nightmares of a dark, indistinct figure, approaching him through watery hallucinations which are interrupted by glowingly normal daytime sequences (in one of which his stepfather, a clergyman, reminds him of the nightmares he had as a child of his body being stolen), usually with a sprinkler whispering on the lawn.

At this point, Weir digresses to reinforce the s-f hints of a gathering storm with some aboriginal magic. Two lengthy sequences, largely without dialogue, show a group of aborigine youths pursuing another, who is vaguely accused of having appropriated some religious relics. The chase begins in an elaborate network of sewage tunnels, takes in a bar-room brawl and some extended patchwork detail of Sydney night-life, before ending in a slow-motion confrontation on a building site, where the offender is brought down by an elderly aborigine who points a 'death bone'. When the youths are accused of the murder, David is called in by a friend in a legal aid office to help in their defence, and discovers that one of the boys, Chris Lee (Gulpilil), is the figure of his dreams. Although the youths are unwilling to talk, David becomes obsessed with the idea that the crime is related to some ancient tribal secret (and to the increasingly strange weather). His efforts to press Chris on this point lead to the film's third and most mystical level: David is himself a throwback to an ancient spirit race who, in aboriginal lore, were the

first inhabitants of Australia; his dreams represent some stirring of that previous life, connecting him both with the aborigines' secret and the prophecy of cleansing holocaust which that race left behind.

But long before the film has clinched this final revelation, a double awkwardness has set in, on both narrative and thematic grounds. The mechanics of the murder investigation and the subsequent trial seem, for one, an irrelevant construction, a rather clumsy device for bringing David and the aborigines together. Related to this are the sporadic attempts to motivate the hero, or at least to lend him the complexity which will support his later prophetic role. Such exposition tends to jut self-consciously from the film: the jibe of a barrister friend, for instance, that David is a well-heeled corporation lawyer who is making a fuss of the aborigines' case simply out of a misguided and condescending romanticism. Even more precariously placed, David's brief conversations with his stepfather are sententiously self-defeating, from the latter's casual observation that, even as a boy, David was uncannily accurate in his premonitions to David's aggrieved outburst, 'Why didn't you tell me there were mysteries?' Once having detached them from an overweeningly colourful background, Weir has never been able to shape or define his characters with much confidence.

But if the film proceeds by fits and starts in this respect, at the deeper level it fails to jell at all. The authenticity of its references to the 'Dreamtime', and to aborigine tribal and spiritual matters in general, has been vouchsafed by the co-operation of the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation and by the participation in the film of Nandjiwarra Amagula (as the elder aborigine, Charlie), a JP and spiritual leader in the Groote Eylandt community. In the jostle of his plot, however, Weir never really establishes the validity or even the full significance of these elements, allowing them to be undercut by the cruder cliffhanging devices: the escalating dream sequences and the final flurry of action in the underground temple of David's forebears.

In particular, the invocation of some weighty tribal 'secret' being guarded by the young aborigines, buttressed for a while in the script by a running argument as to whether city aborigines have any tribal ties, becomes an elaborate red herring. Whether their secret is the existence of the ancient grotto, the prophecy daubed on its wall, or simply the location of their own tribal ground within the anonymity of the city, is a confusion passed over in the rush to propel David into a new dimension. His qualification to be this world's

prophet of doom, or the man who stands at the brink of an age of spiritual regeneration, must also be taken on trust, given the foregoing emphasis on unexceptional domesticity, which Weir has rigged to heighten anticipation. In the end, the local inflections of *The Last Wave* float by on the general banality of its holocaust and hocus-pocus models.

RICHARD COMBS

Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000

By an alliterative conceit that signals the non-naturalistic form of Alain Tanner's *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000* (Contemporary), each of the eight protagonists bears a name beginning with M. Fittingly, this is the middle letter of the alphabet, and they are approximately at the mid-point of their lives as well as being in the middle of a possible historical evolution; being, in fact, inside the 'whale of history' that, according to the sung refrain that concludes the movie's main action, will in the year 2000 disgorge the as yet unborn Jonah into a new world. He will then be twenty-five, roughly the age they were at the time of the Paris events of 1968, which provide a fulcrum for the film (more or less literally, since the sole visual allusion in the shape of a newsreel clip occurs at its mid-point) yet are seldom overtly referred to.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of a film whose orientation is denoted by main titles imposed on a wholly red image, is that while it is schematically structured and deploys the distancing devices of formalised camerawork and lighting (bright, primary colours), its characters are constantly individualised, in the writing (the script is by Tanner and John Berger) as well as through the performances Tanner draws from his remarkable cast. Humanistic details inform these putatively representative figures: 'I'm Labour but you don't look much like Capital,' Mathieu, jobless factory worker turned market garden labourer, tells his employer Marguerite. Her small-holding provides the film's central reference point, drawing together considerations of both ownership and natural resources, and combining the spheres of Marx (whose analogy between gold and faeces is quoted during the film) and Rousseau (whose statue appears at its opening, accompanied by a voice-over quotation).

Throughout the film, the incidents in which the various characters are involved relate to one or other of these preoccupations. Thus Max (Jean-Luc Bideau), the former radical pamphleteer, finds his energies rekindled by exposing an industrialist's scheme to dispossess small farmers, while Marguerite's husband Marcel campaigns for endangered wildlife. Max's lover Madeleine subscribes to a mysticism which places emphasis on natural diet, while Marie (played with marvellous charm by Miou-Miou) takes the direct action of undercharging impecunious pensioners for the food they need at the supermarket where she works—and ultimately goes to jail for it: it is the least doctrinaire of the characters who becomes the most overt martyr.

In a sense, the exception to this pattern is the schoolteacher Marco (Jacques Denis), who attempts to offer his pupils a radicalised awareness, and is eventually sacked for his pains. Yet the classroom scenes are crucial to the movie's method and purpose. In the first of these, a democratic, anti-doctrinaire concept of education is visualised by the circular panning shot around the classroom as various students intervene; later, the humanistic aspect of the synthesis taking place is made apparent when it is in the classroom, in front of the pupils, that Marco first declares his love for Marie.

The alimentary metaphor from which Marco initially proceeds—the composition of sausages—is analogous to Tanner's use of the market garden, where all eight characters are drawn together (in deliberately arbitrary fashion, heightening the intensity of their experience) and briefly share a sense of communal purpose. This is where Mathieu (Rufus) sets up an infants' school in a greenhouse

Richard Chamberlain in *'The Last Wave'*



and plays his charges recordings of the sounds made by endangered whales, sounds which may resemble cries of despair but which he chooses to describe as singing. And singing is important in the film: the impending birth of Jonah to Mathieu's wife is heralded in song by the assembled octet, as they sit round a table, eating food grown by themselves and thus free from, for example, the 27 varieties of chemicals which, it is alleged earlier, are sprayed on to a single lettuce. There may be grounds for despair—the chemicals, Marco's lost job, Marie's forthcoming jail sentence—but responses can be codified (whales, Marcel has said, make coded noises) and solidarity can be expressed through singing.

One of the codifications of Tanner's movie lies in another song, in which Mathieu hymns the praises of the onion, a vegetable to which he imputes the enduring and inherently proletarian values of being thick-skinned and resilient; this can be seen to rhyme with a peculiar previous verbal reference—immediately after the newsreel glimpse of May 1968—to the crushing of tomatoes. It links also with the visual juxtaposition from an expanse of excremental mud to a row of onions being planted by the members of the *ad hoc* commune, just as this contrast fits into a nexus of imagistic cross-references by summoning up the juxtaposed distinction between Max's theoretical condemnation of Geneva as a retentive (i.e. constipated) city and Mathieu's pragmatic declaration as he forks a load of manure, 'I'm the king of shit.'

The film ends with two codas. The first, set a year after the main action, shows Mathieu, the commune now dismantled, cycling to another factory job through a pitiless urban landscape and alongside a railway track which can be interpreted alternatively as pointing a way into the future or representing an other-directed determinism; in voice-over he vows to marshall the spiritual resources of the former group so as to create a changed future for his son, in effect husbanding history as well as fathering Jonah. This resolve inevitably recalls the mock-heroic group portrait in the form of a cartoon drawing on the wall of the market garden, which was first seen during the onion planting sequence. A concluding flash-forward, set in 1980, shows Jonah himself, now a cherubic five year old, busily scribbling on this portrait with a chalk: we must be prepared, the film seems to be saying, to make ourselves the writing on our own wall. The music which plays over the end titles is jauntily optimistic.

TIM PULLEINE

Hamlet

Celestino Coronado's sixty-seven minute, highly subjective interpretation of aspects of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which was produced in 1976 for £2,500 by the Royal College of Art, has after screenings at a round of festivals finally been taken under the protective wing of the Essential distribution company. Coronado has retained only fragments of the long revenge tragedy which producers have regularly balked at mounting in its entirety; most of the secondary characters have been eliminated and those who remain—Hamlet, the ghost of Hamlet's father, Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia, the Player King and sundry members of his troupe—have been transported in their psychedelic costumes to some timeless vacuum, to the recesses, one might speculate, of the sleeping Hamlet's brain, far removed from the tangle of pillars, parapets and stone stairs which, together with the tones white and black, are customarily associated with Shakespeare's Elsinore. This sense of dislocation—and it is primarily a sense of dislocation rather than specific relocation—is heightened by the central significance that Coronado places upon the play depicting the murder of Gonzago.

Apart from a circular stone monolith, divided in four, which we see at the beginning and end of the film (and of which we may make what we will), the action of the film is backed by darkness. The



'Jonah who will be 25 in the year 2000': Jacques Denis, Miou-Miou

Players' Scene, however, is performed against a vivid backdrop, which, combined with the scene's uncharacteristically detailed exposition, has the effect of giving this fiction within the fiction a greater 'reality' and significance than the somewhat arbitrary fragments of the original drama. In as far as anything is the climax of Coronado's *Hamlet*, it is certainly this allegorical play-cum-dumb show; after it, the director's grip on the original narrative becomes increasingly tenuous, the personalities of Gertrude and Ophelia appear to unite and Hamlet is seen neither to die nor to be revenged. On one level at least, the effect of this emphasis on the dumb show is to suggest—and Coronado's earlier work in association with the mime Lindsay Kemp buttresses such an interpretation—that the players' grotesque portrayal of sexual infidelity (and in particular the performance of their leader, played in transvestite clothing by Vladék Sheybal at his most unalluringly fish-eyed) in fact encapsulates all we need to know about the wider circumstances of Hamlet's dilemma.

What then do these symbolic fragments comprise? Broadly speaking, a highly partial reading of Hamlet's motives: his hatred of his mother—played with effect by Helen Mirren, with a shock of grizzled hair, a painted face, distended stomach and garish emerald bodice—is complete. She is a whore who betrayed Hamlet's noble father for the obese Claudius (Barry Stanton), a man given to dispensing his largesse by rubbing his palm on the band of gold paint on his forehead and then smearing it on the forehead of the recipient. The wooing of Ophelia becomes not the excuse for the dissimulation of madness but simply Hamlet's opportunity to vent his bile at the inconstancy of womankind.

Whether or not one accepts this interpretation—and most people, I believe, would find it limited—the strength of Coronado's *Hamlet* is to be found elsewhere: in the compact intensity of his design, its technical realisation and, above all, in the conception of combining the roles of Hamlet and the ghost of Hamlet's father. Recorded on video and then, because no automatic video editor was available, projected and re-filmed on 16 mm Eastman stock, the film looks as though it has been shot through scrim: the hazy images, which in fact complement Coronado's design, overlap and fade in and out of one another with an uncannily ethereal quality. Twin brothers (simply credited as 'Hamlet') play the two sides of the Prince's nature—the dilatory man of flesh-and-blood (David Meyer), and his violent conscience

(Anthony Meyer). The latter also personifies the ghost of Hamlet's father: in both guises he is an invisible presence, Hamlet's shadow lurking behind but ready at all times both to speak for him and if necessary to assault him physically. The 'Get thee to a nunnery' speech comes vividly alive when rendered simultaneously by the two sides of Hamlet; while the naked ghost coming to the sleeping Prince at the beginning of the film, whispering in his ear and then pulling off the sheet to reveal his own or his son's nakedness, suddenly sets off a chain of resonant echoes and intriguing though never ultimately justified suggestions.

Coronado's *Hamlet* is held together in large part by the poised confidence of the principals, notably by Helen Mirren and the Meyer brothers. That it ultimately fails to deepen our understanding of Shakespeare's play—in the sense that after watching Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* we are provoked into thinking about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from a different perspective—is due in part to the limits of Coronado's scope rather than to a failure in the boldness of his design and execution. When Polonius is stabbed in Shakespeare's play, to take only one example, we are almost bodily drawn into Hamlet's dilemma, compelled to foresee the outcome of his action. At no point, however, does Coronado's *Hamlet* assume a tragic dimension; the protagonist himself is not notably flawed; we have no real sense of his capacity for self-destruction. Coronado's *Hamlet* is a victim, trapped in a nightmare, betrayed by his mother.

JOHN PYM

L'Innocente

Luchino Visconti's *L'Innocente* (Miracle) opens with a shot of a book—Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel of that title—lying on a table. There is a zoom-in to get a closer look at the cover, a zoom-out, and then a gnarled and yet frail hand enters the frame and starts turning the pages. The hand is reputed to be in fact that of Visconti, but even if it were not its place in the fiction would be the same. It is the hand of the film author, an old yellowing hand on an old yellowing book, the two perhaps contemporary. What we are about to see, therefore, is not just a film of the book, but implicitly a restoration of a common past.

Nothing in the film quite fulfils the promise of the opening moment (just as nothing in the Taviani



'L'Innocente': Giancarlo Giannini, Laura Antonelli, Marie Dubois

brothers' *Padre Padrone* ever lives up to the Brechtian moment at the beginning when the author instructs the actor). But *L'Innocente* is nevertheless a remarkable film, both in itself and in relation to Visconti's other work. It is first of all, it should be said, a triumph of décor—a décor beyond the dreams (or imagination) of MGM in its heyday, since so much of it is created in real locations. The concept of the décor is nevertheless theatrical, so that places become sets rather than sets being used to recreate places. In the matching of sets and costumes, scenes and compositions are allocated a single dominant colour. Gold, or gilt, is pervasive, but there will be scenes or shots which are mostly crimson, or beige, or green, with the women's clothes blended to the décor and only perhaps the black and white bourgeois costume of Tullio (Giancarlo Giannini) to break the prevailing tonality. There is however no sense of enclosure, or a submergence of human figures in their setting, such as one finds in *Conversation Piece*, where the focus line tends to pass through the background figures and the soft—or unsharp—focus makes shadowy boundaries between person and place. Rather the settings form a concordant part of the rules of the game—a game which Tullio plays to the utmost, until destroyed by the incursion of an alien element into it.

Tullio, the central but not necessarily the most interesting character, is the empty D'Annunzian superman, a salon Nietzschean whose superiority and indifference take the form of a stylishness which masks an inability to decide his life. So far from being immune to destiny, he is for ever destined to repeat variations on a single scenario. Ostensibly his life is devoted to women (the classic wife and mistress syndrome), but it is his relations with other men that constitute the underlying and unacknowledged problem. These relations are of jealousy and competition—ritualised in the fencing matches with his rivals (including his brother) and the donning and doffing of a mask before and after each bout. Disturbance of this potentially interminable pattern is provided only by his wife's pregnancy by another man and the subsequent birth of her child. Here is a rival not allowed for by the rules, and one with whom he cannot fence. The child is a boy and, although illegitimate, will be Tullio's heir; and its mother loves it. He brings about the infant's death, but the freedom thus given him to return to the game does not last long. He has a brief reunion with Teresa, his mistress, and kills himself. Neither death is fully explained by the film in terms of character motivation. Tullio's act remains an enigma. Although the film

hints at possible interpretations, the hints given are—in my opinion deliberately—insufficient.

The absence of a sufficient psychology for the character is perhaps what has caused *L'Innocente* to be compared to Dreyer's *Gertrud*. But whereas in *Gertrud* the insufficiency is such as to undermine any sense of the film as a realistic fiction, here realism is maintained. If what Tullio does and what happens to him remain enigmatic, it is not because the film's construction refuses to the spectator evidence of the status of the events shown, but because Tullio is, simply, an enigmatic character. The character has motivations, but they are unclear to him, and unclear to us. A far more relevant comparison would be with *Lo Straniero*, Visconti's own 1967 adaptation of Camus' *L'Étranger*. Tullio is in many ways the character that Mastroianni's Meursault should have been in the earlier film, but was not. What Visconti did in *Lo Straniero* was to endow Meursault with a psychology—a 'character'—which Camus' text refuses to him. Meursault becomes a man who is inexplicable, whereas in the novel he is simply unexplained. In *L'Innocente* the form of character creation is similar, but more successful. This could partly be because D'Annunzio's text is less radical and more conventionally literary; but it is also the case that with *L'Innocente* the relation to the text, and the sort of literature it represents, is more carefully meditated. This is confirmed not only by the film's opening but by a reading of Visconti's work as a whole, in which a meditation on literature is often a key element.

The construction of *L'Innocente* seems to me to run along dual lines. On the one hand there is the creation of an as it were autonomous fiction, with characters possessed of a certain degree of freedom and mobility and a certain degree of knowledge: characters, in other words, to be looked on as characters. And on the other hand there is an investigation of a world in which such characters are thought to exist. It is all too easy when trying to make sense of the film to elide those two lines into each other, and to see the world of the film as that of a decadent society, thereby missing the point, for what is in fact at stake is not a decadent society but a decadentist literature which provides the rules of the game which Visconti then scrutinises. The film is always striving towards the realisation of something artificial, a fiction materialised with real actors in real places, which nevertheless constantly declares itself as a fiction.

This anomaly is a source of hidden tension, giving rise to unanswered questions. The characters are more seriously at odds with one another than

the plot-line suggests. The two women, in particular, seem to occupy different worlds, in the sense of belonging to different fictions: Teresa (Jennifer O'Neill) to a sort of comedy of manners, in which the characters are wise beyond their actions; Giuliana (Laura Antonelli), the wife, to a genre more romantic and yet closer to the real, in that it is her producing a child that lets in the element of disturbance. Teresa's blindness to what is outside the game is deliberate: she sees and turns away. Giuliana is confused and hysterical, but her confusion is a symptom of something not acknowledged in the comedy. The film never really resolves itself in one way or the other—which has always been the weakness of Visconti's films, but also their strength.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

Tracks

'Do you think about your childhood often?' wonders the soldier (Dennis Hopper) waiting on the platform at the Santa Fe railroad station, 'When the going gets rough, I think about my childhood...' And suddenly, as the coffin he is escorting back home from Vietnam for burial is loaded aboard in its Stars and Stripes shroud, the soundtrack is flooded with the martial glories of a World War Two song (coming, as we learn later, from the cassette recorder that is the soldier's inseparable companion): 'Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition/All aboard; we're not a goin' fishin'/Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition/And we'll all stay free.'

Brave words ringing out from a war revelling in the knowledge that it was justified as a fight for freedom, and by extension echoing the soldier's unspoken question as, buttonholing the passengers on board the train one by one, he hesitantly tries to tell the story of the man in the coffin, a black soldier, his friend who saved his life and whom he is taking home to a hero's welcome and funeral. What, exactly, was Vietnam for? No answer is forthcoming as he is met by varying degrees of embarrassment, indifference, hostility and pity, and not for nothing is Henry Jaglom's film called *Tracks* (Screen on the Green) as the train drives unswervingly on across America from West to East, the mystery and promise of its one-time pioneer landscapes studiously ignored as the passengers bury their heads in preoccupations with private obsessions (chess problems, nutritional needs, land development, sexual urges), and as the despairing soldier is driven to try to jump these tracks and go off in reassuring search of his roots.

Deploying precisely the same themes and methods as *A Safe Place*—the quest for a refuge in the past, the interchangeability of reality and fantasy, the accompanying stream of nostalgic songs—*Tracks* is very much a companion-piece to Jaglom's first film, the sole difference being in the shift from private to public disillusionment. Withdrawing from the hurt of emotional entanglements, the girl in *A Safe Place* is able to find solace by retreating entirely into the shelter of a memory; seeking similar refuge in his past, the soldier in *Tracks* finds only a lie that casts him back into the present again.

He is, one might almost say, a man without a past, since he has been translated direct from childhood fantasies of military glory to the unheroic realities of Vietnam; and his counter-track on the train, his *regression*, is in quest of that missing adolescence. Looking back on innocence in the shape of a wide-eyed junior miss (Taryn Power) going on holiday with her girl-friend, the dreamy yearnings constantly proclaimed by the cassette recorder ('Don't sit under the apple tree/With anyone else but me...') are decreed impossible less by her protest that a date should not kiss with such avid eroticism (ironically, a product of the 60s, she reveals herself to be no stranger to permissiveness) than by the soldier's increasing awareness of another self within himself put forever beyond reach of innocence by the experience of Vietnam. (A self revealed not only by his rampant response to

the advances of another lady who travels in hope of finding sexual adventure, but in his persistent distortion of realities into fantasy images of rape, murder and betrayal.)

So, regressing further yet, he reaches home, the town where he was born and the house where he grew up. And there, with Fred Astaire pointing ambivalently to the love he lost on the train or to the safe place it has returned him to ('Some day when I'm feeling low/When the world is cold/I will feel a glow/Just thinking of you/And the way you look tonight'), he recaptures the memory he struggled to recall during the journey. On the wall of his room, among the toy soldiers and cannons and the military pennants, is an embroidered sampler with the legend 'Poverty is no crime'.

Confronted by the final mendacity of this truism added to all the others on which his life has been built, he leaps into the open grave, opens the coffin to remove his weapons and battle equipment, and frenziedly embarks on his assault on the society that made both him and the war. Alone and unheard, he cries his futile protest, 'You want to go to 'Nam? I'll take you there...'

Much less naive than this reduction of its complex structure inevitably makes it sound, *Tracks* falters only in trying to provide objective (even though fantasised) correlatives to the soldier's puzzlement and pain. Over-emphatic and unnecessary, these scenes (the imaginary rape and death of the girl, the possibly real arrest of a political subversive after his betrayal by the soldier) tell one less about the whole American moral and social dilemma over Vietnam than one brief shot in which Dennis Hopper (brilliant throughout) is seen alone in the corner of his compartment, struggling to assert his bitterness and anger over an overwhelming impulse manifested by his hand to come up in an obedient military salute.

TOM MILNE

The Last Waltz

'It's a celebration...' 'Of a beginning or an end?' Although it has a necessarily rhetorical ring, and one doesn't really expect the film to deliver a definitive answer, the question is still relevant to much of what is happening in *The Last Waltz* (United Artists). It is asked early in the piece by director Martin Scorsese of Robbie Robertson, lead guitarist of The Band, about the concert which they held on Thanksgiving Day 1976, in Bill Graham's Winterland in San Francisco, to mark their farewell to concert tours 'on the road'. Undoubtedly, given the film's title and subject, and Scorsese's tendency to work in an apocalyptic register, an air of *Götterdämmerung* hangs over *The Last Waltz*. This is the end of an era in popular music, one apostrophised finally by Robertson when he marvels that he and The Band have spent sixteen years on the road, quails before the prospect of pushing their luck any further, and then enumerates the performers, from Hank Williams through Janis Joplin to Elvis Presley, who have given their lives to the tradition. But more than this, the film is a collage of two decades of beginnings and endings, a two-hour whistle-stop tour across the map of pop music, its sense of the history of its subject peculiarly internalised so that, in Scorsese's words, 'there's connective sense, but not really in terms of one thing leading to another; it makes spiritual sense.'

Such a notion of order, of course, is largely a matter of imposing private meanings on the public event. And this is the paradox on which *The Last Waltz* turns, in more than one direction. The emotional significance of the music for Scorsese, the selection of numbers he has made from the seven-hour concert featuring not only The Band but a galaxy of guests, the progression through the varieties of country, blues and rock 'n' roll music, establish this as one of his most personal films. Consequently—yet unexpectedly, given the *cinéma vérité* tradition of concert films from *Woodstock* through *Monterey Pop* to its most consciously mediated and manipulated form in *Gimme*

Shelter—the style he has chosen seems almost deliberately to remove the concert from the public domain and treat it as original feature material. The film was shot in 35 rather than 16 mm (at one time, Scorsese was contemplating blowing it up to 70 mm) and by such virtuoso feature cameramen as Laszlo Kovacs and Vilmos Zsigmond; only one hand-held camera was used and that, Scorsese insists, was also in a fixed position.

In addition, three numbers were recorded after the event inside a studio. The florid camera movement bestowed on 'Evangeline' serves to underline its more lyrical quality and also perhaps its folk pedigree in the descent of rock music. The concluding number, 'The Last Waltz', a tribute to The Band, caps the rococo setting of the Winterland with further artifice as the camera, in one long caressing movement, pulls away from the group on their darkened sound stage and retreats down a lane of lights, borrowed for the occasion from the final railway station set of *Silver Streak*.

Further distinguishing it from other film testaments to the rock culture of the 60s and early 70s, *The Last Waltz* has little room for its audience, except as a dimly perceived, surging mass in one or two shots. Scorsese's picture of a generation and its changes is concentrated entirely on the style of its performers, and in this respect is the most powerful, musically intense of all the concert record films. That the developments related in the course of *The Last Waltz*—cued by some intercut discussions between Scorsese and the members of The Band—all seem to occur at flashpoints of personal, musical and political history, fully expressed only in the exploding performances on stage, is, finally, both its strength and its weakness. The snatches of reminiscence from The Band, properly used by Scorsese not to augment but to pinpoint the context of the songs, are often succinctly expressive: thus, Robertson's recollection of The Band's early, trying experiences in New York dovetail with an account of how the 60s sounded the death knell of Tin Pan Alley, when that institution's customary subjugation of the writer was challenged by a new breed of lyricists writing songs for the 'people' and the age of revolution. At other times, a little augmentation might have prevented the historical moments being swamped by their emotional associations: 'on the road' in itself is such a culturally specific concept that it seems rather skimmed here in The Band's brief anecdotes about their hard first eight years and the presence of Lawrence Ferlinghetti reading a parody version of the Lord's Prayer.

But at its best the style of *The Last Waltz*, at once kaleidoscopic and concentrated, discursive and fixated, distils more about its subject and its times

Taryn Power in 'Tracks'



(and about its maker and his obsessions) than the impressionism of *cinéma vérité*. Before the credits, the film opens on an isolated sequence of a group of individuals playing pool: the game, says one, is called cut-throat, and the object is to keep your balls on the table while knocking everyone else's off. And this odd recall of the setting, ambience and social mechanisms of *Mean Streets* is later obliquely 'placed' by one of the concert guests who reads what she calls a one-line poem from the 50s, 'Get your cut throat off my knife.' When Scorsese cuts from Muddy Waters and the blues song 'Mannish Boy' to a sleek performance from Eric Clapton, the connection is pointed by a previous discussion with Levon Helm, who talks of the area around Memphis as the home of country, blues and blue grass performers, and in reply to the question, 'What's killed them?' says 'Rock 'n' roll'.

The Clapton number also emphasises an amusing contrast in contemporary styles: between the concentrated but coolly controlled Englishman (who scarcely seems to move on stage) and the more exuberant Americans. But it is only towards the end, when The Band becomes once more a backing group for Bob Dylan—who is summoned, like some demon presence, by a camera panning down from the lights and decorations on to a huge close-up of his illuminated hat—that one has a proper sense of the film (so smooth yet electrifyingly integrated is Scorsese's coverage) as the record of a live event. For the first time, the on-stage hesitations and consultations between numbers are included before the climactic, communal rendition of 'I Shall Be Released' and Robertson's final, voice-over observations on the road. The real ending, however, seems to have come a little before, in a conversation recorded between Scorsese and The Band in their retreat, an ex-bordello called The Shangri-la. Here, amid a decor congruent both with the decadent trimmings of the Winterland and an archetypal Scorsese setting, the director obtains an answer, if not to his first question then to the one that might have followed it, when one of the group sums up what he is doing now 'The Last Waltz' is over: 'Just making music, man, trying to stay busy.'

RICHARD COMBS

Looking for Mr. Goodbar

Before the opening credits for *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (CIC) are over, Richard Brooks has given fair warning both of his editing-hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye visual style and his hectoring approach to his subject. In a montage of black and

white still shots, Theresa Dunn (Diane Keaton), smiling enigmatically like some Mona Lisa on the wild side, slips through the threatening ambience of neon-lit streets and dim, smoky bars. That her night life will involve more than the simple bar-hopping indicated by the title (curiously, the film never includes 'Mr. Goodbar', her favourite singles' haunt) is finally signalled by a zoom into a cross dangling on a bare bosom. The portentous invocation of Catholic guilt and psychotically split personality couldn't be clearer if 'Madonna and Whore' had also been laid out in blinking neon.

Subsequently, despite the zeal with which Brooks is forever loading his dialogue with 'terrible truths' about Catholicism, the family and sexual aberration, a lot more seems to be missing from the film than a justification of its title. Largely this is the result of the frenzied shooting and editing style, which reduces scenes to TV-commercial proportions and creates a specious sense of an inexorable mechanism (human corruption or the permissive age, perhaps) driving Theresa to her doom. On the way, the motivations and explanations bluntly stated in the script scarcely have time to become part of the narrative or even to attach themselves to the characters. Diane Keaton's much-heralded performance is impressive mainly because her strength and sensitivity as an actress seem to be operating apart from the underdeveloped character she is playing. The meretricious construction is immediately obvious in the one major change Brooks has made to Judith Rossner's original novel: where the latter revealed at the outset the circumstances of Theresa's death at the hands of one of her casual pick-ups, Brooks leaves this revelation to a lurid finale, thus reducing the psychological study of a self-willed victim to a suspense shocker about the manner of her end.

Even more obviously than with *In Cold Blood*, Brooks' slick technique and deterministic cross-cutting render socially and psychologically ambitious themes into the cheapest moral tale. Here there is no actual mouthpiece—like the journalist-cum-chorus of *In Cold Blood*—to deliver the lecture, but the journalist in Brooks is constantly reducing characters and situations to 'information', which the moralist proudly draws on for his message. Thus, the strangely unreal tableaux of the family scenes: Theresa's occasional visits home always trigger a display of their joint psychosis. Her mother, a resentful domestic drab, clings to her faith even in personal defeat; her father (Richard Kiley), belligerent in his prejudices, seems to take as a deliberate act of filial ingratitude Theresa's childhood illness which has left her with a scar on

her back and a slight limp, until he is finally skewered by a moment of truth and forced to admit that her disease might have been inherited through his side of the family; and her sister Katherine (Tuesday Weld), the beautiful and adored child, is secretly sinking in a morass of drugs and promiscuity. Similarly, Theresa's first sexual experience, with college professor Martin Engele (Alan Feinstein), treated at some length in the novel because it shows her transferring self-loathing from her family to her adult life, is glibly skimmed by the film only to make a point about her sexual voraciousness.

If the novel's chain of cause and effect is missing in this *Mr. Goodbar*, a sense of Theresa's slow drift into a bifurcated existence—by day teaching the children she would never want to have herself, by night picking up the men she never allows to remain in her bed until morning—it is because Brooks views her problem as a primary spiritual condition. He treats the relationship between the two Therasas as a modern Jekyll and Hyde story, and sees her, in fact, as living in some kind of original sin—she is presented, after all, from the start as being an habituée of the singles' bar circuit. And given Brooks' oddly artificial, panoramic treatment of this world, it is one in which she looks quite comfortably absorbed, at home. The pay-off for this dichotomy, inevitably, is the obscenely staged death scene: bathed in the on-off glare from a stroboscopic toy which another lover has given her (because it reminds him of her day-and-night nature), Theresa ecstatically invites both rape and murder from the panicked, disturbed individual she has picked up a few hours earlier.

Myriad distortions and confusions follow from this literally black and white view. Theresa's other lovers are also shut away in the day and night categories, and so tend to be grotesque caricatures. Her most successful lover, because the most violent and unpredictable, Tony (uniquely well cast and performed by Richard Gere), exists on the level of one constantly dancing, jabbing, exploding high; yet here the film misses one of the most touching scenes in Judith Rossner's generally rather diagrammatic novel, when Tony awkwardly attempts a kind of integration by introducing Theresa to his family. On the other hand, Theresa's goody-goody suitor, social worker James (William Atherton), is presented entirely as an extension of the family. And by failing to suggest any intimacy in their relationship, Brooks skimps the real sadness of Theresa's rejection of the life he offers, since she requires by now the excitement and isolation of furtive sex to complete herself.

Throughout, given the puritantly ill-lit treatment of the love-making scenes, the film seems unable to accept the force and clarity of Theresa's sexuality as anything other than a weakness. Instead, its hopes for a better life are concentrated on the cloyingly overstated scenes showing Theresa at work with the deaf children. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Brooks is harking back to the liberal-humanist optimism of *Blackboard Jungle*—especially given the gratuitous scene in which Theresa is rescued from a belligerent Tony by the formerly surly elder brother of one of her black pupils. For the rest, his attempt to put together another broadly relevant tract for our times sputters out in an emotive fit of bad faith—as though the case were being presented by someone of the temperament and generation of the film's maudlin father.

LOUISE SWEET

The Spongers

A crowded family living room, disturbed by the arrival of the bailiffs. Cut to hoarding size blow-ups of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh resting against a lorry. Superimpose baldly the title *The Spongers*. This is the start—crude and effective—of Jim Allen's television film, produced by Tony Garnett and directed by Roland Joffé. The ironic title refers to Pauline (a fine, harassed performance by Christine Hargreaves) and her family of four children (including a mongol daughter subject to fits), deserted by her husband, forced to seek state support, and owing £262 in rent arrears. Set against the tinsel backcloth of Jubilee year, a time of high unemployment and public spending cuts, *The Spongers* (BBC TV) is a grim parable of the 70s welfare state, in which the legacy of its founding socialism appears to be bureaucracy concerned with balancing budgets. Stripped of humanity, the desiccated socialism of the pragmatist reigns. 'There's only one way to be a socialist,' the local councillor and chairman of the Social Services Committee bawls at the community worker pressing Pauline's case, 'and that's to face real facts and figures.'

The Spongers deals in two kinds of 'reality'. Credited with three researchers, it is in the same naturalistic documentary drama tradition as the Sandford-Loach-Garnett *Cathy Come Home* (1966), sharing similarities of theme and treatment. *Cathy* was about the disintegration of a family brought low by unemployment, subsequently homeless, buffeted by a hostile bureaucracy. It caused a stir, a lot of righteous indignation, and had no effect—at least on the homelessness figures. But it set the pattern for naturalism in television 'drama'. Twelve years later, *The Spongers* uses real locations (the council estate, a children's home, a working-men's club) and a cast largely of unknowns (an actual mongol child plays Pauline's daughter); and succeeds in conveying the rough edge of reality, mixing pre-scripted sequences, semi-improvised scenes and slices of life. The mix jells, but uneasily.

Cathy Come Home has been described as a brilliant tear-jerker, a howl of protest on behalf of the homeless. In 1974, referring to the political content of his productions, Tony Garnett said: 'We're hammering things a lot less. If we look back collectively on the work ten years ago and the work now, part of the progress has been not having to underline everything three times in red any more in order to think you're making the point.' Ken Loach later echoed this: '... I think many people react against something which speaks to you sternly from the screen, and tells you what you must think. So we've tried to make films which will communicate in a narrative way, which will share experiences with the audience, and in which the audience will come to the same conclusion that we've come to.' *The Spongers* reflects this.

'Spongers' itself is an emotive phrase much bandied about by the popular press to smear claimants of Social Security, the rogues and the genuinely needy alike. Here, in a scene in the working-men's club, the community worker scorns

'Looking for Mr. Goodbar': Diane Keaton



a stand-up comic's wisecracks about the payment of welfare benefits in pesetas, all the better for holidays in Spain—the stuff of sensationalised news stories. As he sums up for Pauline, 'If you're poor, you're to blame; if you're on the welfare, you're fiddling . . . you're inadequate.' Pauline has already been branded guilty in a piece of double talk by a council official, a smokescreen for her mongol daughter's removal from a children's home, where she was happy, to an old people's home, where patently she is not. Earlier Pauline is refused a further special payment to clear her rent arrears—she's told she's 'a bad manager'. In the film's most affecting sequence Pauline's father (Peter Kerrigan) brokenly explains to an appeals tribunal why she needs the money. He speaks to camera, and the humiliation jumps out from the screen.

There are fewer underlinings in *The Spongers*. Despite the inclusion of apparently overt 'political' statements, Allen's script is consciously even-handed, at least in its treatment of the battery of welfare state officials as people rather than mere mouthpieces. The worried bailiff admits—to Pauline's disbelief—that he doesn't like doing his job when children are involved. When Pauline's father tells the social worker that she is 'useless', the despairing insult is balanced by our knowledge that, however well-intentioned, she is powerless in the face of the system and the exigencies of budget control; and her superior has already told her that she is too emotionally involved in the case. There are no villains in this piece, only people without the power—or the guts—to intervene.

Pushed from pillar to bureaucratic post, Pauline eventually kills herself and her children—a conclusion more appalling even than the end of *Cathy Come Home*. Where the Allen-Loach *The Rank and File* ended with a quotation from Trotsky, *The Spongers* opts for the less narrowly political but still pointed judgment passed on Pauline by a neighbour: 'She had no right to do it, she should have stuck it out like the rest of us, instead of letting them get one over on her.' But this oblique appeal to a defiant class solidarity is whistling in the dark, unable to compete with the immediately preceding images of death, as ambulancemen wind a tortuous way down the steps of a council block, stretched bodies covered in red blankets. Such tragedies are well authenticated. But here the viewer, confined within the narrative of a 'true' story, inherits an overwhelming sense of despair, the mind-numbing impotence traditionally induced by television's surfeit of bad news.

This can hardly be the effect intended by filmmakers who admit to political ends. Naturalism as a vehicle for promoting political change has been criticised before, on the grounds that it paradoxically tends to enshrine the institutions it attacks. If the institutional determinants of oppression are perceived by the oppressed as part of a natural order (poor as she is, Pauline gives a few pence to the Jubilee appeal), it's an inadequate political strategy to invite the viewer to identify with the bewildered community worker, isolated in the closing image of *The Spongers* as the credits roll.

PAUL MADDEN

Europe After the Rain

Europe After the Rain (Arts Council), written and directed by Mick Gold, sets out to document the ideas that nourished Dada and then Surrealism from the 1920s to the present. It does so by means of a montage of artefacts (paintings, objects, film clips), interview material, dramatisation (very successful), newsreel and TV footage, and some animation (very unsuccessful). The director's aim was to emphasise the desire the participants felt to 'unify political and psychological values with artistic creativity.'

The film, the Arts Council's most ambitious production to date, is pedagogical in tone. It attempts to describe events and ideas as they unfolded in linear time—a linearity which is underlined by the final slow-motion 'resumé'. The narrative is centred on individuals, notably Tzara,



'The Spongers': Paula McDonagh

Breton, Duchamp, Arp, Schwitters, Ernst and Dali. This is history for schoolkids—'dates', 'kings and queens' and all—with barely a trace of dialectic. But things aren't as straightforward as that. There is just as much reason to see surrealism as a radical break with dada as there is to see it as its continuation. Dada itself can hardly be said to have clean lines: the geographical distance between Zurich, Berlin, Paris, Cologne and New York saw to that. Dada was a moment when various diverse strands of modernism were given a moral dimension by events and seemed to come together. Mick Gold hints at this divergence when he describes how a formalist like Kurt Schwitters (who to my mind is given an exaggerated importance in the film—perhaps the consequence of the relative availability of archive material) was rejected by the highly politicised Berlin dadaists. The linearity of surrealism, too, has been constantly ruptured by the regroupings and reorientations which have kept a revolutionary idea alive and kicking over fifty years.

The problem of centring *Europe After the Rain* on individuals becomes most acute when we consider that surrealism is a group activity. Breton, who stands as a cipher for 'surrealist theory' in the film, was often in the minority at these group meetings; the film's use of him as a paradigm implies the cliché of seeing Breton as the 'Pope' of surrealism. The use of quotations is problematic, too. Why, for instance, is there no mention of the surrealist response to the Stalinist diatribes of Tzara and Sartre after the liberation of France, or even an attempt to describe their position in 1945 so that we can make up our own minds about the validity or otherwise of what they said? But of course it will be said that everything can't be said: telescoping 50 years into 88 minutes must involve schematisation and abstraction. Given that rule of thumb we must ask how accurate such abstracted history can ever hope to be, and what attitude the film-maker has to his material.

The director of *Europe After the Rain* has, I believe, a respectful attitude towards the cultural and political 'achievements' of dada and surrealism in the sense that the film explicitly celebrates their

part in our 'cultural heritage' and implicitly celebrates the big-heartedness of a capitalist democracy anxious to welcome (posthumously) its prodigal sons back into the fold. Occasionally, however, a certain aggression peeps through, suggested by a perhaps ingrained respect for Sartre (what is he doing in the opening montage, by the way?) and a measure of contempt for the ageing Breton (who is supposed to have turned away from real life into a world of the 'occult'—the appearance of a mandala implies that Breton's idea of 'magic art' was Jungian, which it was not).

The film's treatment of surrealism after 1945 is confused. We are told that Breton was disturbed at how surrealism was consistently misrepresented, and to substantiate this there is a montage of TV advertisements which employ a sub-Magritte aesthetic, together with clips from *Monty Python*. (Incidentally, the surrealists have written enthusiastically about Python's progenitor, the Goons.) This, together with a sage Duchamp musing about anti-art becoming art, is intended to be the final word, the last nail in the coffin of dada and surrealism. But I can see nothing surprising about this art being recuperated, debased and perverted by capitalist society. A 'cultural heritage' is good propaganda in democracy's ideological battle with totalitarianism. Though anti-capitalist in nature, dada and surrealism are too big a fish to let slip through the net, which must be woven accordingly. Surely the interesting question is how and why this happens—and where films like *Europe After the Rain* fit into this process.

Gérard Legrand (who might have told Mick Gold something about mandalas) says this in his recent book on Breton: 'Surrealism will reappear as a permanent menace, as a myth of spiritual agitation, no longer the ghost of itself, something that at best enhances literary history by its supposed dilution into the "decor of everyday life" or even into the least sclerotic culture, as expressed on the walls of the Sorbonne in 1968.' If this is right—and I believe it is—any film which doesn't harp on this note is flawed.

PAUL HAMMOND

The Middle American Sky

from page 100

base very simple films have in common: they all conjure before us the image of the unknown and in each of them it is represented by something immense and in an important respect unknowable. We shall, it is suggested, never understand the primeval shark, the nature of 'The Force', the metaphysical power that Luke Skywalker finally acquires in order to defeat his enemies, nor how the mother ship of *Close Encounters* works nor where it came from. In *Jaws*, we are presented with the terror of the unknown: it could happen; the model shark stands in for the real thing; an extremely remote possibility is artfully transformed into a present probability. In *Star Wars*, an unknown past, before the dawn of mankind, is transformed into a comic-strip reality: it couldn't happen, we are comfortingly reassured, but wouldn't it be fun to imagine... In *Close Encounters*, the unknown becomes a visible fairy castle, the inhabitants of which are endowed, it seems, with an immense benevolent power.

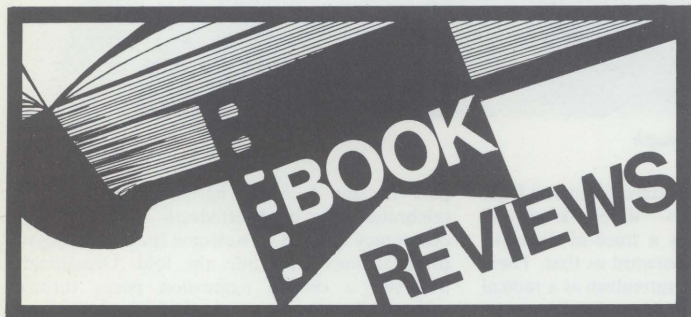
Spielberg posits that the evidence suggests this could happen; sit back and marvel.

The success of these films can be attributed in the main to the way in which the unknown has been packaged. The proof now exists that there are more than nickel-and-dime profits to be had from these products: they have been sold less as movies than as events and they have brought in their wake spin-off goods—rubber sharks, posters, books, robots, food, not to mention that tried, but recently revitalised gimmick, duplicating and imitating success.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with purely escapist entertainment; indeed, in the case of the first two of these three films it signals a return to a masterly style of audience manipulation for the sake of 'horror' and amazement. However, the absence of any subtext (discounting the rather barren game of reference-hunting that can be played with *Star Wars*), leads one to ponder whether this form of movie-making—each new blockbuster attempting to out-gross the last—can lead to a regeneration of the criteria of popular entertainment movies. At present the appeal

of these big three is that they offer if not a unique experience then at least something—because of their scale, and because part of the fun to be had from them depends on that old-fashioned sensation of sitting in a crowded movie theatre—that television cannot equal. To a generation of children and teenagers who have spent Saturday glued to the cartoons in the front room instead of watching a serial in the front stalls, these movies are a novelty: but to survive and prosper, a novelty requires, among other things, the combined, equally old-fashioned qualities of design, narrative and human as well as humane believability.

Jaws, *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* require only that their audiences react; they demand no commitment—no strong feeling one way or the other; they are passive films; the first two ask no questions and expect none to be asked, the last puts a proposition but will bridge no argument. They are films largely unaffected by the sterner qualities of irony; they reassure us partly because they are themselves so effortlessly self-assured, and because they can, when they wish, make us sit up so smartly. ■



THE PENGUIN FILM REVIEW 1946-49

SCOLAR PRESS, two volumes, £20.00

Roger Manvell's Pelican book *Film* was published in 1944 and sold, in its ten years or so in print, upwards of half a million copies; which must still give it a long lead over any comparable film book published in Britain. Out of *Film* grew, rather rapidly, the *Penguin Film Review*, whose nine issues appeared between 1946 and 1949, to be followed until 1952 by three Pelican annuals called *The Cinema*. It's worth remembering that Penguin made this sustained effort to bring film books into their paperback empire long before film study became all the rage. Scholar Press, in reprinting the full run of the *Review*, gives us a chance to take another look at the Manvell enterprise of thirty years ago.

Scholar's two volumes are a handsome publishing exercise—better looking than the originals, which were printed on the porridge paper of the post-war years. Paper restrictions also explain the *Review's* hybrid status: new magazines couldn't obtain paper, but publishers who had a mind to it and some paper stocks on hand could pass off magazines as 'books'. All the same, one reason for the *Review's* fairly brief life may have been a confusion among readers about just what they

were getting. Another was the failure of the editors. Roger Manvell, Rod Neilson Baxter and the late H. H. Wollenberg, ever to make the publication more than a worthy effort. The awareness of a mass readership may even have been inhibiting, since they were so resolutely determined not to cater to mass taste.

The *Review* attracted some contributors worth having: in the first issue, Anthony Asquith, Richard Winnington, Nicole Vedrès, Michael Powell ('Disney—the greatest genius of us all,' he notes, in an unexpected aside) and Michael Balcon, who was already insisting that British film-makers must not be allowed to fly away to Hollywood salaries. In later issues, there is a euphoric piece about British cinema by David Lean ('I doubt if any other group of film-makers anywhere in the world can claim as much freedom'); a slightly curious one by Fritz Lang, speaking up for happy—or at least 'affirmative'—endings on the screen; and a reminiscent one by Arletty ('I can still remember most of my shorthand'). In 1947 Edgar Anstey was already foreseeing the death of black and white films. The *Review* published Eisenstein on stereoscopy, as well as an early article on film and television techniques and a plea for a kind of film EEC—'by creating a union in film economics, a cultural film policy could be evolved.'

But the *Penguin Film Review*

didn't spread itself critically: it set out rather to inform, on the basis that film was the mass medium (this, after all, was the time when thirty million tickets were still being sold each week) and that out of this great audience might be carved a 'serious' sector for 'intelligent' films. The *Review* was decidedly serious, and rather stodgy with it; it published too many short articles on big themes, skimmed round-ups of this and that; and it reflected, again and again, two attitudes which explain a good deal not only about itself and its assumptions but about the post-war mood.

The first notion was that British films had 'come of age' during the war, through the union of fiction and documentary, abetted by the mood of audiences. And the second was that America, as a nation, had not yet 'come of age' and was being kept in its nonage largely by Hollywood. This probably had less to do with films as such than with a reaction to the American presence in Britain—the GIs, 'over-fed, over-paid, over-sexed and over here', in confrontation with the age of Austerity. The theme is set by Richard Winnington in issue one: 'British films have come to possess a craftsmanship and freshness above that of the regular flow from Hollywood. By contrast they seem miracles of taste and intelligence.' British screens must be defended against occupation by 'celluloid that is seventy-five per cent geared to the lowest tastes of a less matured and less experienced people.' Winnington chipped away at this theme as long as he wrote for the *Review*, and others joined in: 'the intelligence level of Hollywood pictures has gone down roughly in proportion to the rise in quality of our own pictures' (E. Arnot Robertson); 'the average mental age of the American audience is around fifteen years' (Jan Read).

'It is, I think, their heritage to

invigorate the whole business of film-making,' wrote Winnington of British films, wishing them 'into realms of thought and feeling they inherit but never fully enter.' It seems a very long time ago. And one had forgotten how much this sense of promise (not to be rediscovered, perhaps, until the altogether flightier and less high-minded mood of the 1960s) was linked with the urge to knock Hollywood. *Sequence*, at the same time, was discovering Ford and Minnelli and the American films of Max Ophüls; in that sense, and in the sense of everything that followed from it, *Penguin Film Review* was being left behind before it started.

By 1949, gloom was rapidly setting in. British films were found to be losing 'that human touch and vitality of theme'; their actors, it was sourly noted, were 'little empty-faced boys and girls'. And by the last issue of the *Review*, crisis had returned to the film industry: studios were closing down and deputations visiting the Board of Trade 'almost daily'. In its final editorial, the *Review* is sadly wondering where the lost opportunities had gone to. *Penguin Film Review* was an offshoot of wartime seriousness about the arts in general and of post-war euphoria about British cinema in particular. It was not to last long.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

CHAPLIN, GENESIS OF A CLOWN

By Raoul Sobel and David Francis
QUARTET BOOKS, £5.95 (paperback £2.95)

What makes this book important—and it is important; indeed I believe it to be the most significant work on silent cinema to appear since *The Parade's Gone By*—is the fact that it is about precisely what its subtitle claims: Chaplin's development from his early variety days through the Keystone, Essanay and Mutual

periods (1914–1917) and the factors that influenced his work and brought about his success.

Far too much of what has been written about Chaplin has treated him as an isolated phenomenon, a comic superstar whose achievement was rooted only in his own unbounded talent. Such a view is of course nonsensical. Chaplin gained his original experience within the English music-hall and was thus influenced by traditions that can be traced back for hundreds of years. (The book contains detailed comparisons with the techniques of the English clown Joe Grimaldi and of Jean-Gaspard Debureau, the French mime whose work was painstakingly recreated by Jean-Louis Barrault in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, both of whom were at the height of their powers nearly a century before Chaplin entered the theatre.) Indeed, working for Fred Karno, Chaplin was probably more influenced by such factors than was, for example, Buster Keaton who, though having a longer theatrical experience, had gained it within a particularly idiosyncratic family act and so was less subject to outside influence.

Once Chaplin entered films he became subject to the control of his studio and its style, which in turn was the product of a long theatrical tradition. Though he quickly won a considerable degree of freedom from the Keystone house style, Chaplin had still to work with other Keystone players and his personal acting style had to take account of this. Even had he somehow found a means of making films entirely free from external influence, their success would have been determined by what audiences were prepared to accept. The success that Chaplin did achieve cannot be separated from the fact that a few earlier comics—notably John Bunny—had already accustomed audiences and cinema managements to the possibility that screen comedy could be considerably more subtle than had hitherto been assumed. The book recognises these facts; indeed its basic thesis is that Chaplin was 'a product of his time as well as an artistic phenomenon.' And Sobel and Francis have had the sense to jettison any attempt at chronological narration of Chaplin's career.

The opening chapter recounts the development of the star system in Hollywood; an odd starting point perhaps, but I think a valid one in so far as what was always exceptional about Chaplin was less his individual talent (considerable though it was) than the utterly disproportionate amount of adulation he received. After a terse three pages on the futility of seeking 'the real Charlie', 'the inner Chaplin', the book progresses to the arrival of the cinematograph, which it roots firmly in the context of Victorian popular culture. This is succeeded by a sharp account of social conditions in Victorian London and the music-hall's role as a social safety-valve; the authors go so far as to suggest, arguably perhaps, that its decline was linked to the growth of the trade union movement, in that 'the more the working classes could experience

their grievances in action, the less they needed music-hall as a release.'

It is not until halfway through the book that Chaplin starts to appear in the text at any length, with a chapter detailing the known facts about his personal history and including a valuable chronology of all major verified information and credible unsubstantiated evidence. This is followed, in one of the book's most interesting sections, by an account of the Keystone tradition and its antecedents, with particular attention paid to the *Commedia dell'Arte*, whose influence on slapstick comedy goes far deeper than merely having provided its name. This leads logically to a description of Chaplin's personal technique and its relation to previous screen comics, from early clowns such as André Deed ('Cretinetti')/'Foolshead') and Charles Prince to the vastly more sophisticated talents of Max Linder and John Bunny.

After tracing the development of the Chaplin myth in his relations with press and public, the book reaches its two final chapters, which provide the most detailed direct examination of Chaplin's work. The first analyses his screen persona, dwelling on such points as the Englishness of his clothes and the incorrectness of describing 'The Little Fellow' as a tramp. The second analyses his comic method and details Chaplin's debt to, among others, Fred Karno, Dan Leno, the screen comics already mentioned and Fred Kitchen, the unfortunate member of one of Karno's troupes who was reputed to have taught Chaplin so much (in particular, his repertoire of falls and kicks) that he would never play in the United States for fear of being taken for a Chaplin imitator.

Large sections of the book contain little or no direct reference to Chaplin. The authors have cleverly overcome any potential loss of continuity by intelligent use of illustrative material and captions, which are distinct from the major text. They are thus enabled to highlight direct and indirect connections of various kinds without having to diverge at all from their central theme. Thus, the section of Chapter Four dealing with the music-hall includes a set of stills from the scene in *The Cure* (Mutual, 1917) where Chaplin parodies *tableaux vivants*. Where, however, pictures are selected to illustrate visually points made in the text, they are clear and well chosen, including much rare material. The same care has been exercised in the compilation of the bibliography, filmography, index and list of references.

In short, an utterly absorbing book for the reason that, while its authors say they hope to 'provide a critical assessment that is applicable to all his work', they have done more than that. They have produced a highly detailed study of one example of a general thesis about the nature of the influences upon a film comedian that is applicable to any of the major screen comics of the silent era.

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

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Star Wars

SIR,—By using the notion of two
audiences to disparage both *Star
Wars* and its fans (SIGHT AND SOUND,
Autumn 1977) Jonathan Rosenbaum
purposely raises the old spectres of
high and low culture. He sets the
popular audience, which enjoys 'pure
sensation', against another which
finds Godard's films 'pleasurable to
the mind'—an unequivocal opposing
of, in his own phrase, 'crude reflex
sensation' to intellect, surely all the
more odd coming from a critic wary
of the simple unambiguous oppo-
sitions of *Star Wars*.

Even Godard's lack of popularity
is curiously attributable to *Star Wars*'
success, for Mr. Rosenbaum sees the
PR efforts of the film's media
'collaborators' as corresponding to
the 'Empire's efforts to snuff out
every form of resistance'. But his
regard for the *Star Wars* audience
descends to its lowest when he
irresponsibly links the film's present
appeal to a 'next real opportunity for
automatic, xenophobic destruction'.
If Mr. Rosenbaum had watched the
film closely, resisting the opportunity
to interpolate his own feelings about
the primitive hankerings of the sub-
intellectual mass audience, he may
have noticed that the 'enemy' was not
a fantasised Third World people but,
quite the opposite, a highly ornamen-
tal incarnation of the old American
'Military-Industrial Complex'. How
else can Darth Vader (Death
invader?) be read but as the death
instinct of the corporate elite?

With a less prejudiced judgment of
the tastes of the popular audience,
the film would not be written off so
easily as mindless nonsense, or be
so undervalued by those critics for
whom the film 'doesn't seem to mean
anything' other than simple enter-
tainment. When has it ever been
simple?

Yours faithfully,
GORDON PEPPER

Montreal, Canada.

Lang's Pessimism

SIR,—I found George Wilson's article
on Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once*
(SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1977)
interesting and would like to append
a few comments.

How one reacts to Eddie's final
vision depends, I suppose, on how
one regards the concept of Christian
redemption. One might assume the
ending was insisted on by the
producers to counteract the unre-
mitting bleakness of the film's vision
up to that point. Other crime films of
the period have similar conclusions:
in Curtiz' *Angels with Dirty Faces*
(1938) Cagney 'dies yellow' on his

way to the electric chair to redeem the
slum kids and the last scene has
boyhood friend-priest Pat O'Brien
and the boys going to pray for
Cagney's soul. In Walsh's *High Sierra*
(1940) Bogart meets a fate similar to
that of Fonda in Lang's film and Ida
Lupino finds solace in the fact that he
'crashed out' from the prison of
existence.

An earlier reference point to *You
Only Live Once* is Lang's own *Destiny*
(*Der müde Tod*, 1921) in which the
heroine loses her lover to death. She
pleads with Death himself who offers
her the opportunity to save three
lives, each represented by an almost
extinguished candle. She is unsuccess-
ful in her endeavours but, in seeking
to save some children from a burning
house, she herself is killed and
reunited with her lover in the
afterworld. The ending of both this
and *You Only Live Once* would imply
that happiness and fulfilment aren't
to be found in this life and shows that
the pessimism of Lang's outlook
remained consistent over the years.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM THOMAS

North Bergen, New Jersey.

Annie Hall

SIR,—I wish I could agree with the
recent SIGHT AND SOUND review of
Annie Hall and, indeed, with prevail-
ing critical opinion, which seems to
consider it Woody Allen's most
successful film. I, too, see it as
something of a departure for him, but
only in a more damaging sense: where
once he was content to poke fun at
himself, he's now taken to putting
down the rest of us—and patting
himself on the back.

For example, *Play It Again, Sam*
has Allen getting so nervous at the
start of a blind date that his voice
turns into a croak and he accidentally
flings a record across his living room.
Yet in *Annie Hall* it's Diane Keaton
who becomes inarticulate and flus-
tered; Allen himself remains cool and
a trifle amused. He's a hit on a TV talk
show, he scores equally well at a
political rally, and college audiences
worship him. We get, in effect, an
anthology of his best routines,
complete with applauding crowds
and lines of admirers eager to
congratulate him after the show.

Yet how does Allen regard his
fans? The same way, apparently, he
regards everyone else: with contempt.
In *Annie Hall*, these 'fans' appear as a
pair of grinning neanderthals who
bother him when he'd rather be
alone; a family of mid-American
Wasps are seen as closet anti-semites,
with a hint of lunacy beneath the
barren exterior; Hollywood types
become a collection of straw dummies
who stand around like people in a
cartoon, mouthing the latest catch-
phrases. He also gets in a few jabs at
his repressive old schoolteacher, his
self-centred Jewish aunt, vapid
Beautiful People (who, in Allen's
fantasy, openly acknowledge their
shallowness), blacks (they steal, we're
told, but some Jews still feel sorry for
them), and a pathetic nightclub comic
who wants Allen to write for him.
(Young Woody is, of course, too
virtuous to sell out.) In this world of
caricatures, Method actors are char-
latans hoping to impress women;

academics are out of touch with reality (as opposed to our hero, who prefers watching a basketball game on television to the pseudo-intellectual chatter of a cocktail party); and movie buffs are (here the man goes too far!) pompous asses who pontificate on the ticket line.

Not that Allen has anything against pontificating. Time after time, more or less at random, he gives himself the opportunity to deliver pronouncements on things that irk him. We learn that he disapproves of drugs, TV laugh tracks and arriving late to films; a poetry collection, conveniently among Annie's belongings, provides the prop for a dismissal of Sylvia Plath. The ultimate effect of such preaching is that Allen emerges as a kind of latter-day Voltaire, the only sane man left amid a fatuous world. Even his weaknesses are really strengths. His inability to drive well lifts him above the empty freeway culture of Los Angeles; he gets a queasy stomach at the hypocrisies of Hollywood. In fact, the very ending of the film shows him off to moral advantage: it is the beloved Annie, shallow after all, who 'goes Hollywood' (literally), while our hero remains true to himself and Manhattan.

Annie Hall is a very funny movie, but I am bothered by its tone of self-aggrandisement—the same self-aggrandisement I've seen in recent interviews, in which we are offered a new, 'profound' Woody Allen, brooding about fame and death and the pressures of the fans, dreaming of a day when he'll make serious, Bergmanesque films. I fear he may be halfway there already, for in *Annie Hall* he's given up playing the clown and has taken on the mantle of sage. It is, I think, a most regrettable transformation.

Yours faithfully,

T. E. D. KLEIN

New York.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GIDEON BACHMANN is at present in Israel, shooting two documentaries about Israeli cinema and television... ROBIN BROMBY is a freelance writer and film-maker, who has recently made documentaries for New Zealand television... ROBERT COHEN is writing a book on the films of Mizoguchi... PAUL HAMMOND is a painter and writer (his books include *Marvellous Méliès*); he organised the recent season of surrealist films at the National Film Theatre and edited the BFI publication *The Shadow and Its Shadow*... KAREN JAEHNE is an American living in Berlin, a doctoral candidate in classical philology at the Free University; she also works part-time for the Berlin Film Festival... STEVEN KOVACS has spent some time in Latin America, and is now working for Roger Corman's New World Pictures... TIM PULLEINE is a London-based journalist. He is a regular reviewer for the *Monthly Film Bulletin* and has written for *Film Quarterly*.

Sight and Sound

Continuing inflation has unfortunately made an increase in the price of SIGHT AND SOUND unavoidable. With effect from this issue, the yearly subscription rate will be £3.30. Single copies will cost 70p from bookshops and newsagents, and 88p by post from the British Film Institute, Publications and Membership Services, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA.

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EMI for *Apocalypse Now*.
RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *The Shout*.
CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Stroszek, Ugetsu Monogatari, Jonah Who will be 25 in the Year 2000*.
OPPIDAN for *Dark Star*.
MIRACLE FILMS for *L'Innocente, Assault on Precinct 13*.
SCREEN ON THE GREEN for *Tracks*.
CINEGATE for *Sansho Dayu, The American Friend*.
TRINACRA FILMS for *Les Routes du Sud*.
DIMAGE for *Pourquoi Pas?*, photograph of Coline Serreau.
FILMOBILIC for *La Tortue sur le Dos*.
DIAGONALE for photograph of Paul Vecchiali.
BBC-TV for *A Day Out, Sunset Across the Bay, Three Men in a Boat, The Spongers*, photograph of Alan Bennett.
RADIO TIMES for *A Visit from Miss Prothero, Play Things*.
LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION for *Eighteen Months to Balcombe Street*.
KEYSTONE PRESS AGENCY for photograph of Sir Harold Wilson.
ROBIN BROMBY for *Wildman*.
ANA CRISTINA HENRIQUEZ for photograph of Venezuelan Film Office staff.
VENEZUELAN FILM OFFICE for *Trampa Inocente, Simplicio*.
NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE/THE SIR MICHAEL AND LADY BALCON COLLECTION for photograph of Sir Michael Balcon.
NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Burlesque of Carmen* and Chaplin photographs, *The Devil is a Woman, The Blue Angel, The Shanghai Gesture, Dishonoured, Shanghai Express, Sisters of the Gion, The Lady from Musashino, The 47 Ronin, Street of Shame*.

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Film Guide

ANOTHER MAN, ANOTHER WOMAN (United Artists)

An oddly flat and distanced Western from Claude Lelouch, largely filmed in long shot and bathed in a relentless golden glow. The opening chords of Beethoven's Fifth occasionally suggest that the lack-lustre plot and characters have a fateful destination. The actors fill in with some mooring, improvised-sounding dialogue. (James Caan, Genevieve Bujold, Susan Tyrell.)

**ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13 (Miracle)

John Carpenter's agreeable second feature sets faceless night-time hordes against the defenders of an abandoned California police station: a lone black police officer, a laconic murderer and the precinct's plucky slow-burning secretary. A humorous and invigorating movie, which manages to reconstitute a durable Hawksian formula. (Austin Stoker, Darwin Joston, Laurie Zimmer.)

BAD NEWS BEARS IN BREAKING TRAINING, THE (CIC)

Dismal sequel to *The Bad News Bears* which totters into all the sentimental traps so carefully dodged by Michael Ritchie, meanwhile wallowing in several more of its own making. (William Devane, Jackie Earle Haley; director, Michael Pressman.)

BLACK PANTHER, THE (Alpha)
Restrained, occasionally gripping but ultimately spurious case-history which never comes to dramatic grips with its protagonist and side-steps the controversy surrounding police handling of the case. (Donald Sumpter, Debbie Farrington; director, Ian Merrick.)

BOYS IN COMPANY C, THE (EMI)

English-language film from Hong Kong which attempts to do a *M*A*S*H* on the Vietnam war but muffs the provocation and the jokes, gets grossly sentimental, and ends up stoutly waving the Star Spangled Banner. (Stan Shaw; director, Sidney J. Furie.)

*CANDLESHOE (Disney)

Uneven but rather likeable mix of sentiment and spoof thriller set in the Disney version of Olde England. Brisk direction helps; so does the practised ease of David Niven. (Helen Hayes, Jodie Foster; director, Norman Tokar.)

**CET OBSCUR OBJET DU DESIR (Artificial Eye)

Magisterially, Buñuel rearranges key themes from his own work (notably echoing *L'Age d'Or*, *Tristana* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*) to come up with a caustic (and brilliantly funny) analysis of terrorism in all its assorted forms. (Fernando Rey, Carole Bouquet, Angela Molina.)

CHOIRBOYS, THE (GTO)

A rough, raucous equivalent to *Catch-22*, plodding lamely through Joseph Wambaugh's best-selling novel about Los Angeles cops. Pointlessly episodic, the film has filtered away even the novel's flimsy structure and interest in the cops' psychological need for their bouts of hell-raising and 'choir practice'. (Perry King, Charles Durning, Don Stroud; director, Robert Aldrich.)

**CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (Columbia-Warner)

Steven Spielberg's s-f spectacular turns out a mixed but not unappealing bag, a

combination of pixilated inspirational fantasy and heavy-footed uplifting religiosity. Before the plot dips into solemn, 50-ish clichés, Spielberg plays out the UFO phenomenon with a magical sense of both irony and mystery. (Richard Dreyfuss, François Truffaut, Melinda Dillon.) *Reviewed.*

**CRAZIES, THE (Screen on the Green)

Inhabitants of small Pennsylvania town begin going berserk after bacteriological warfare mishap. Rather predictable in its treatment of Establishment evasions; otherwise one of George A. Romero's engagingly ruthless horror movies. (Lane Carroll, W. G. McMillan.)

**DARK STAR (Oppidan)

This oblique and witty tale of four freaked-out astronauts on a mission to destroy unstable planets glides with delightful ease between the clichés of filmic space travel. Beautifully executed on a bootlace budget, the film spirals away at the end on a charming lyrical/philosophical conceit. (Brian Narelle, Dan O'Bannon, Dre Pahich; director, John Carpenter.)

**DERSU USALA (Curzon)

Kurosawa's quaintly charming co-production, magnificently set in the wilds of Russia's Pacific seaboard and saved from too much Soviet uplift by Maxim Munzuk's performance as the ancient oriental backwoodsman who teaches a team of land surveyors to recognise the true harmonies of nature. (Yuri Solomin.)

**DEVIL, PROBABLY, THE (Artificial Eye)

Bresson's bleak, wholly individual vision of an irredeemably forfeit world. A young drop-out in present-day Paris fruitlessly attempts to alleviate the pain of life before paying a drug addict to shoot him dead. Distanced by its method, we are ultimately rewarded by the film's sometimes densely intractable demands. (Antoine Monnier, Tina Irissari, Henri de Maublanc.)

FOUR FEATHERS, THE (Trident-Barber)

A. E. W. Mason's schoolboy romance appears finally to have breathed its last. Beau Bridges impersonates the conscience-stricken English hero with only slightly less conviction than Don Sharp directs this unimpeachable remake. Box-office bloodshed is curiously kept to a minimum. (Simon Ward, Robert Powell, Jane Seymour.)

**GAUNTLET, THE (Columbia-Warner)

The best of the urban thrillers in which Clint Eastwood has directed himself. *The Gauntlet* imports the larger-than-life quality of *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and goes some way towards transcending Eastwood's Dirty Harry persona. A splendid finale combines Western shoot-out, black farce and religious allegory. (Sondra Locke, Pat Hingle.)

*GOODBYE GIRL, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Neil Simon has returned to familiar territory, setting his new screenplay in the hard-bitten world of the New York theatre. The snappy ripostes and tearful sentimentality of this glycerine romance are as calculated as ever. (Marsha Mason, Richard Dreyfuss; director, Herbert Ross.)

**HAMLET (Essential)

Shakespearean tragedy as psychodelic psycho-drama in Celestino Coronado's wayward but always striking and often surprisingly rigorous reworking of the bard. Twins double as Hamlet while Helen Mirren does the same for Ophelia and Gertrude. (Anthony Meyer, David Meyer.) *Reviewed.*

**JONAH—WHO WILL BE 25 IN THE YEAR 2000 (Contemporary)

Alain Tanner's meditation, cast in the form of a contemporary fable, on the multiple options encountered and enjoyed by a group of young people

in the dead time after the events of '68. A film which questions rather than asserts, co-scripted by John Berger and accurately glossing the confusions of a 'lost' generation. (Jean-Luc Bideau, Rufus, Miou-Miou.) *Reviewed.*

*LAST WAVE, THE (United Artists)

Peter Weir's handsomely shot holocaust movie is fine as an atmospheric mystery thriller but comes confusingly unstuck when it tries to transport blank-faced Richard Chamberlain, a lawyer defending Aborigines on a murder charge, into the angst-laden realms of precognition. (Olivia Hamnett, Gulpilil.) *Reviewed.*

LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR (CIC)

Comedienne Diane Keaton astutely reincarnates herself as the heroine of Judith Rossner's novel, about the victim of a modern double-life. But Richard Brooks' direction is also schizophrenic, pretending to be coolly objective about the singles' bar milieu while giving vent to a do-gooder's disgust. (Tuesday Weld, William Atherton, Richard Kiley.) *Reviewed.*

**1900 (Fox)

A long operatic chronicle of Italian history from 1900 to 1945. Peopled by an uneasy international cast, the film's truncated episodes, sumptuously filmed by Vittorio Storaro, finally fail to constitute the coherent, grandiose and highly personal reading of social and political history that Bertolucci intended. (Robert De Niro, Gérard Depardieu, Burt Lancaster, Sterling Hayden, Dominique Sanda.) *Reviewed.*

PETE'S DRAGON (Disney)

Treacly and flat-footed Disney fantasy about orphan boy and pet (animated) dragon, short on spontaneity, heavy on unmemorable songs. High-spirited choreography affords only meagre relief. (Sean Marshall, Mickey Rooney; director, Don Chaffey.)

PINK FLAMINGOS (Screen on the Green)

This cut-price exercise in foot-stamping bad taste is of incidental interest for the overweight presence of the exuberant, androgynous Divine. The plot—a camp competition to determine who is the 'filthiest' person in the world—gleefully piles on the soft-core degradation. (Director, John Waters.)

**PROVIDENCE (Artificial Eye)

Memory, fantasy and reality interweave in dazzling Gothic splendour as an elderly writer (John Gielgud, brilliant) struggles with pain, insomnia and death while obsessively trying to overcome a block in planning a novel which is reflected, broken-mirrorwise, by Resnais' film. (Dirk Bogarde, Ellen Burstyn, David Warner, Elaine Stritch.)

ROLLERCOASTER (CIC)

A safety inspector (George Segal) pants along the trail of a homicidal killer (Timothy Bottoms) determined to blow up a giant Bicentennial rollercoaster: the chase is so wildly terrifying that even the most delicate stomachs will be left unturned by these 'Sensurround' capers. (Richard Widmark; director, James Goldstone.)

ROLLING THUNDER (Brent Walker)

Paul Schrader freely plunders his script for *Taxi Driver* in order to concoct this thick-car nonsense about a returning Vietnam POW. *Dei ex machina* fall thicker than bodies as the hero's masochistic disgust is converted into a sadistic thirst for revenge, unambiguously indulged by the film. (William Devane, Tommy Lee Jones; director, John Flynn.)

**ROSELAND (Gala)

Set almost entirely in New York's famous dance hall which becomes, in James Ivory's hands, a timeless place haunted by the ghosts of past patrons. The long central story (of three) best illustrates the subtlety of scriptwriter Ruth Praver Jhabvala's precision-

tooled dialogue and Ivory's expert and controlled direction. (Teresa Wright, Geraldine Chaplin, Lilia Skala.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER (CIC)

The most calculated combination of the old and the new to have come from Hollywood in a long time: the new is the disco settings and dances, the old is the creaking sociology and banal plot of a Brooklyn ghetto boy trying to find his way in life. (John Travolta, Karen Lynn Gorney; director, John Badham.)

*SEMI-TOUGH (United Artists)

Michael Ritchie's fairly desultory attempt to resurrect 30s crazy comedy, with Burt Reynolds, Kris Kristofferson and Jill Clayburgh sharing a satisfying platonic existence until the latter two decide to get hitched. Some incidental football scenes and satire of *est*-type therapy. (Robert Preston.)

**STORM BOY (South Australian Film Corporation)

Nicely crafted yarn about an 11-year-old who raises orphaned pelicans and is taught mysteries of the wild by an Aborigine (marvellously played by Gulpilil). Lifted above standard Disney fare by intelligent direction that makes superb use of South Australian locations. (Greg Rowe, Peter Cummins; director, Henri Safran.)

*STROSZEK (Contemporary)

Werner Herzog's most prosaic odyssey to date, taking a trio of immigrants (including Bruno S. from *Kaspar Hauser*) to the New World, which proves to be just as constricting as the old. Herzog seems equally confined by the social observations and dramatic clichés of the road movie. (Eva Mattes, Clemens Scheitz.)

TELEFON (CIC)

An old-fashioned spy thriller, with some cutely inadequate twists; the hero is a KGB agent, assigned to save East-West détente by stopping mad saboteur Donald Pleasence. Charles Bronson, Lee Remick and director Don Siegel trail dutifully but unexcitingly in pursuit. (Patrick Magee.)

*TRACKS (Screen on the Green)

Henry Jaglom's sometimes erratic second film, very much a companion piece to *A Safe Place* in both style and theme, with Dennis Hopper outstandingly good as the soldier returning from Vietnam escorting a coffin and instigating a sort of trial of America as he crosses it by train. (Dean Stockwell, Taryn Power.) *Reviewed.*

TURNING POINT, THE (Fox)

Pure soap opera which, in the guise of exploring some of the issues of the Women's Movement, indulges Anne Bancroft and Shirley MacLaine in old-fashioned star turns and makes coy use of cultural icon Mikhail Baryshnikov. Herbert Ross handles the ballet with little more grace than the bantering, sententious dialogue. (Leslie Browne, Tom Skerritt.)

TWELVE TASKS OF ASTERIX, THE (EMI)

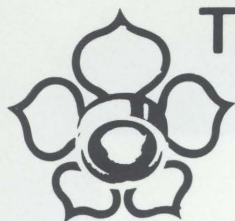
Expensive and neatly animated, this new Asterix adventure is badly let down by weak plotting and too few good jokes to sustain a feature. (Directors, René Goscinny, Albert Uderzo.)

WAGES OF FEAR (CIC)

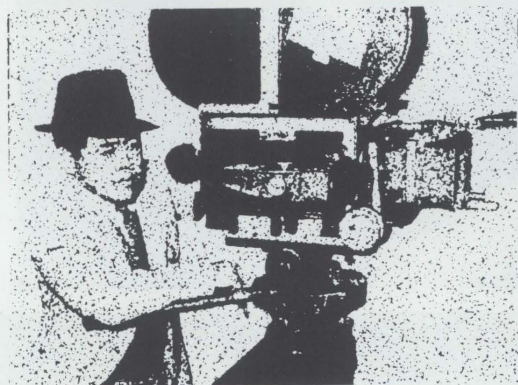
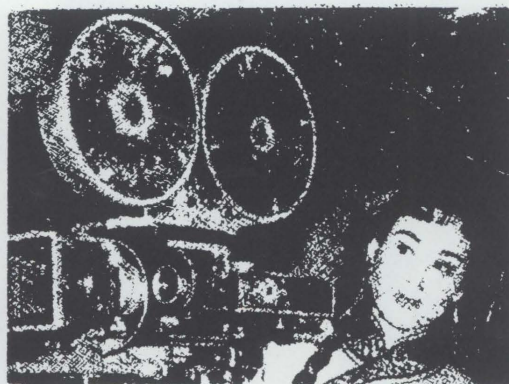
Shorn of twenty-nine minutes, William Friedkin's remake of Clouzot's film now hardly makes sense at all. Even so, disappointing to discover that the film's *raison d'être*—the transportation of the nitro—should fail so miserably to raise any sparks. (Roy Scheider.)

WIZARDS (Fox)

Ralph Bakshi's animated fantasy on a subject evidently derived from *Lord of the Rings*. The character drawing is very dull and Disney-ish and the incorporation of old Nazi footage decidedly spurious. The barrage of special effects hardly bears out the film's championing of magic over technology.



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